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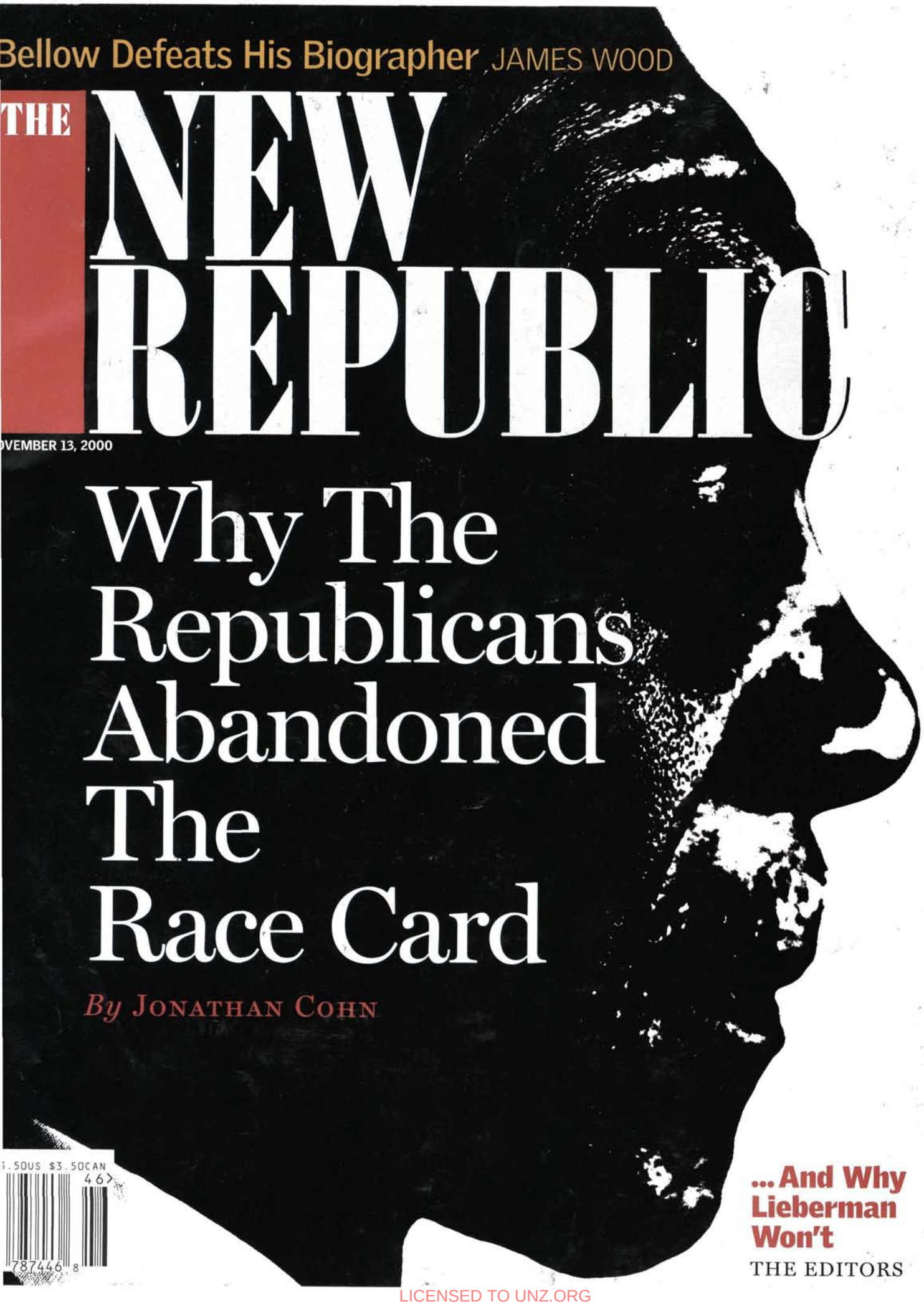
# THE NEW REPUBLIC

OVEMBER 13, 2000



# Why The Republicans Abandoned The Race Card

By JONATHAN COHN

...And Why Lieberman Won't

THE EDITORS

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

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## Vanity fair?

TO THE EDITORS:

In reviewing Gail Sheehy's long and successful career ("Analyze This," October 9), Franklin Foer talked only to sources who almost certainly had personal motives for criticizing her: former employees who disliked Sheehy and people who had partisan reasons for disagreeing with her conclusions in particular articles. When editors at *Vanity Fair* offered to talk on the record about working with Sheehy since 1983 on more than 25 articles published in our magazine, your writer sent us an e-mail message stating that "there's nothing in the piece that we need *VF* to comment on." I find it curious that, in attacking Sheehy's reportorial record, Foer saw no reason to speak to her primary editors and colleagues for the past 17 years.

GRAYDON CARTER
*Editor*
*Vanity Fair*
*New York, New York*

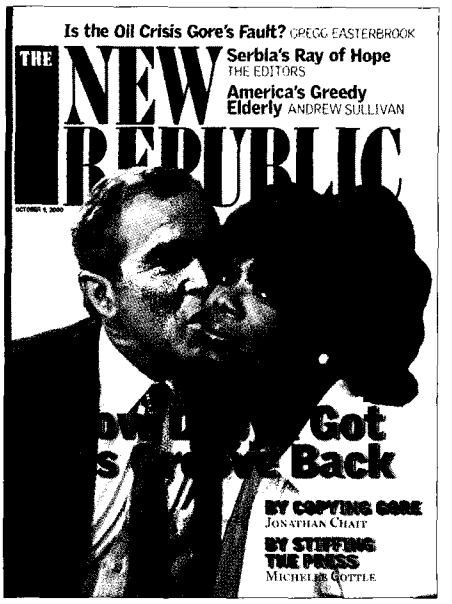
TO THE EDITORS:

When Franklin Foer was writing a piece assessing my entire writing career and the controversies aroused by my work, he called to say that he had only a day to ask me "a couple of questions." This deadline seemed a stretch, since he intended to inquire about a career that spans 35 years, hundreds of articles, and 13 books. The next day I sent him a five-page response, which he simply ignored. He also refused offers from my *Vanity Fair* editors to talk on the record for the article. Foer told *Vanity Fair* that his editors were putting his piece up on the Internet at 3 p.m. that day.

This rush to publish was not necessitated by any news break. The Internet has no deadline, and responsible journalists take the time to check facts. In their haste, Foer and his editors ran a piece that contained many mistakes and false statements. If one journalist is going to accuse another of "getting it wrong," he risks becoming a laughingstock if he himself makes numerous mistakes. Among Foer's:

1. He refers to my method as "recklessly diagnosing psychological maladies," using as evidence my questions about (not diagnosis of) George W. Bush's possible dyslexic traits in an October *Vanity Fair* profile. Dyslexia, though, is not a psychological malady. As I described in the piece, it is a genetic abnormality in the brain structure.

2. In attempting to ridicule my 1990 biography of Mikhail Gorbachev, *The Man Who Changed the World*, Foer states,




"Sheehy described organized crime as nonexistent in post-Soviet life." Had Foer actually read the book, he might have noted that (as the index shows) I devoted 16 pages to describing the Soviet mafia.

3. Foer writes that when my 1999 biography of Hillary Clinton, *Hillary's Choice*, was published, "a list of eminences came forward to claim that Sheehy had either invented quotes or twisted them out of context. (A sampling: Garry Wills, Harold Ickes, Betsey Wright.)" Wills was not quoted in my book. My Ickes quote is verified by my transcript, and he was similarly quoted in *New York* magazine, and Wright's quotes are all in my transcript. In fact, as I was aware that Wright has a history of giving quotes about the Clintons to other biographers, such as David Maraniss, and later trying to duck the Clintons' heat, I reviewed every quote with her before publication and noted her permission, with three witnesses.

4. Foer writes that "[w]hen Hillary's press secretary aggressively asserted that her father had indeed attended her graduation, Sheehy swiftly backpedaled." I did not. In the paperback edition, I added to my account: "A dozen of [Hillary's] classmates were re-interviewed, including former college president Ruth Adams. None remembered seeing Hillary's father." Furthermore, NBC's "Dateline" was told by the White House press office that there was no dispute with my version.

5. Foer states as fact that "one reason for Sheehy's increasing sensationalism may be the competition: With so many reporters now on her turf, her discoveries have to be more and more outrageous to stand out." Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. The fact that so many first-rate journalists are now writing detailed biographical pieces about the candidates only spurs me to look more deeply and offer more nuanced observations. Fortunately, my editors at *Vanity Fair* support me with the time and resources to do such painstaking work.

GAIL SHEEHY
*New York, New York*

FRANKLIN FOER REPLIES:

Gail Sheehy makes it sound as if I never asked for her side of the story. But she neglects to mention our 30-minute telephone interview, during which I confronted her with much of the evidence that appeared in my piece. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to ask all of my questions—because Sheehy ended the interview, claiming, "I am really losing my voice, and I have to save it" for a later interview with French television. She asked that I e-mail her my remaining questions, which I did. Although I had told her assistant of my Wednesday deadline, I didn't receive an answer from Sheehy until Thursday afternoon, after THE NEW REPUBLIC had gone to press. This is the five-page response that I "simply ignored." What's more, I received a call that same day from Robert Walsh, *Vanity Fair*'s legal affairs editor, who asked me to discard Sheehy's response because it contained errors and inaccurate statements about people Sheehy was seeking to discredit.

Sheehy is correct that I erred in writing that Garry Wills complained of being misquoted in *Hillary's Choice*. Rather, Wills says Sheehy misquoted him in her *Vanity Fair* profile of Hillary Clinton, which became a basis for her book. I regret the error.

But Sheehy's other claims are entirely baseless. She says my charge that she "recklessly diagnoses psychological maladies" is false because dyslexia is actually a "genetic abnormality in the brain structure." Is that any less damning? Besides, in other writing, Sheehy has suggested that Newt Gingrich suffers from hypomania and Bill Clinton from "dissociative identities"—a form of multiple-personality disorder. And by devoting a full two pages of her article to her "questions about" Bush's supposed dyslexia, she strongly suggests he is dyslexic. After all, no prominent journalist had previously raised the topic.

Next, Sheehy says her book on Mikhail Gorbachev devotes 16 pages to describing the Soviet mafia. But in that book she concludes: "'Organized crime' is indeed an oxymoron in the Soviet context. Crime is no more organized than agriculture." I do not know whether Betsey Wright always



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complains about her treatment by the Clintons' biographers, but in this case she has reason to feel aggrieved. According to a transcript of Sheehy's interview with Wright (which Sheehy published in *The New York Observer*), Wright describes confronting Bill Clinton with "rumors" of his womanizing: "I just ran through a list of rumors that had been around." This quote does not appear in *Hillary's Choice*. Instead, Sheehy, apparently on the basis of this quote, describes Wright as having "confronted [Clinton] with irrefutable evidence of his sexual profligacy"—thereby twisting Wright's words. (As far as the Ickes quote goes, I've never seen a full transcript of the interview.) Finally, Sheehy defends her description of Hillary Clinton's college graduation. As I wrote in my piece, in the paperback version of *Hillary's Choice* Sheehy altered her prose to allow for the possibility that Hugh Rodham had actually attended the commencement. Sheehy never disputes this. In addition, Jan Piercey, Clinton's roommate, came forward after the book's publication and corroborated Clinton's version of events.

As for Sheehy's contention that I rushed the piece for Internet publication, I have no idea what she's talking about. TNR is a print magazine. I stand by my story.

## Doctor's orders

TO THE EDITORS:

Though flattered that eminent medical commentator Sherwin B. Nuland should think my book *The Rise and Fall of Modern Medicine* merited a seven-page review ("Believe Your Doctor," September 18), I hasten to defend myself against his charge of "bias." He accuses me of being "selective" and "misleading" in emphasizing the fragility of the statistically derived evidence that sustains prevailing epidemiological theories that would, for example, incriminate food as a major cause of common illnesses such as heart disease, stroke, and cancer. His implication is that a different set of statistics might support such theories. The point surely is not whether one set of statistics favors one interpretation and another set a different one but whether, taken together, the evidence is "internally coherent"—whether it hangs together. The statistically derived evidence incriminating smoking in lung cancer is internally coherent, as whatever way the question is examined leads to precisely the same conclusion. By contrast, the evidence that food is a major contributory factor to heart disease and cancer is highly inconsistent, as shown by the lack

*continued on page 45*

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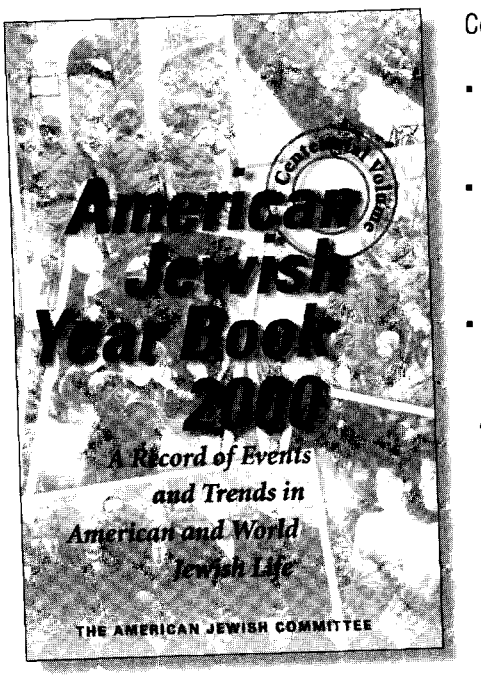
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# TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

# Uphill Fight

WHAT IS THE positive reason to vote for Al Gore? I'm not saying this to be facetious. Yes, I know he's intelligent and experienced. He works hard and can master a brief down to the smallest detail. He survived the Augean stable of the Clinton administration with relatively little dung clinging to his Timberlands. In some important respects—gays in the military, Bosnia, welfare reform, deficit reduction—he was bravely right over the last eight years. But that makes his campaign all the more depressing. What's striking about it, especially in the endgame, is its relentless negativity. Sure, he delivers a few uplifts. "I see a future, now near to us," he told *Time*'s Roger Rosenblatt, "in which we . . . may lead ourselves and the world toward humanity's best destiny." But the general tone of Gore's postconvention campaign has been aggressive and angry. Glance at the images on television these last few weeks. It's always Gore frowning, George W. Bush smiling and winking.

After two months of this, I know what Gore is against. But I'm not that sure what he's for. He's against the entertainment industry marketing to children. He's against the tobacco industry marketing to anyone. He is determined to punish the big pharmaceutical companies for making hefty profits. He is standing up to the "wealthy 1 percent" who will do better under Bush's tax cuts. His campaign has not disowned the telephone push-polls that tell seniors Bush will cut their benefits and was all but responsible for nursing-home deaths in Texas. He won't condemn a race-baiting ad from the NAACP that practically equates Bush with a white lynch mob, and his running mate makes overtures to Louis Farrakhan in a shameless bid for votes. Gore's surrogates say that Bush is too stupid to be president and that a Bush-appointed Supreme Court will threaten the basic rights of minorities and women. Gay surrogates have been sending mass e-mail messages saying they fear for their basic liberties if Bush wins the White House. Barbra Streisand has described the Gore campaign as a "war against bigotry." Gore himself has equated some Americans with vermin. In a campaign stop in Michigan on Sunday, he attacked the "special interests" he claims to oppose with these words: "I know where the rats in the barn are, and you know what? The rats in the barn know that I know, and that's why they're coming out, trying to stop us."

This is called winning ugly. It works, of course. I have no idea who will win this election, but Gore is taking few chances and pulling every lever he can. I was particularly struck by the comment from Joe Andrew, chairman of the Democratic National Committee, that Bush, in opening up a debate about the future of Social Security, had "grabbed the third rail of American politics" but "didn't realize that we hadn't turned on the electricity yet." The electricity in this case is presumably the Gore campaign's targeting of elderly voters in nonstop ads and under-the-radar push-polling. The final week's gains for Gore in Pennsylvania and Florida are a tribute to these tactics. But they are dispiriting just the same.

Aren't the Republicans as bad? They certainly aren't innocents. The rogue "Daisy" ad, accusing Gore of risking nuclear war with China, was awful but so loopy it was almost funny. And Bush immediately urged that it be taken off the air. All in all, what's surprising about Bush's general-election campaign (the primary, of course, was a different story) is how positive it has been. Bush's theme has been bringing opponents together; he has appealed to minority groups, particularly blacks and Latinos; he has avoided the puritanical atmosphere that has often characterized the Republican Congress. Although Bush is no champion of gay rights, he has avoided the gay-baiting of previous Republican campaigns. You may think he's a fake (I have doubts myself), but his public face has been inclusive, and that alone is progress. Sure, there is the ritual denunciation of Washington bureaucrats and the like; and Dick Cheney has accused Gore of fibbing. (An ad released Tuesday reprises the point, accusing Gore of "bending the truth.") But Bush has handled even the attacks on Gore's fund-raising with a certain amount of obliqueness.

No doubt some of this restraint stems from self-interest. Focus groups are always complaining about negative attacks, and since Bush has led in the polls, his staff may feel he can afford to stay nice. But it's not hard to imagine a tougher, nastier (and perhaps more successful) Republican campaign, exploiting cultural wedge issues, hammering on the Clinton scandals, and so on: the kind of shameless campaign Bush père ran in 1988.

But if anyone is repeating the Bush 1988 strategy, it's Gore. In some ways, I think, Gore is more similar to Poppy Bush than W. is. Both Bush senior and Gore are fascinated by and gifted in matters of policy, and both disdain politics. Both have suffered media accusations that they have "wimp" and manhood issues, one bragging about his ability to go "mano a mano" with his opponents, the other French-kissing his wife at the Democratic convention and body-blocking his opponent in the third debate. Both needed to prove themselves by leaving their more politically adroit mentors, Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton, behind. Both had to run as semi-incumbents—making the case for change (my own man) and at the same time against change (the other guy will ruin everything). And both responded to the challenge the same way: Campaign ugly, use your resumé as an argument, and pretend to take the high road. In this respect, both Poppy and Al see politics and policy as disconnected in a way that W. and Clinton clearly do not. But this leaves the vision thing in, er, a lockbox.

Maybe, if Gore wins, that vision will finally emerge. As an erstwhile admirer of Gore's, I certainly hope so. But the trouble with ugly campaigns, as Poppy discovered, is that they make a mandate elusive. President Gore will find it much harder to put this campaign behind him than I think he realizes. He will find it hard to govern as he campaigned, since he knows full well that the insolvency of Social Security and Medicare is not the fault of corporate meanies but of demographic stress on an old entitlement system. He will give even more public money to the elderly, but when the surplus evaporates on inspection, he will find it hard to fulfill all his promises. The Naderite left will still loathe and resent him; the right, feeling that the election was stolen, will try to destroy him. He won't easily be able to govern from the center, because in this race he has abandoned the neoliberalism of his vice presidency and forced even Joe Lieberman to sound like John Conyers. His image in Congress, and to some extent with the public at large, will be sadly sullied.

Maybe he will "fight" again, finding new enemies to conquer, new powerful forces to vanquish, new corporate demons to bully and intimidate. It is an exhausting and embittering prospect, this fight club he wants us to join. No wonder so many voters are reaching for their Valium.

ANDREW SULLIVAN



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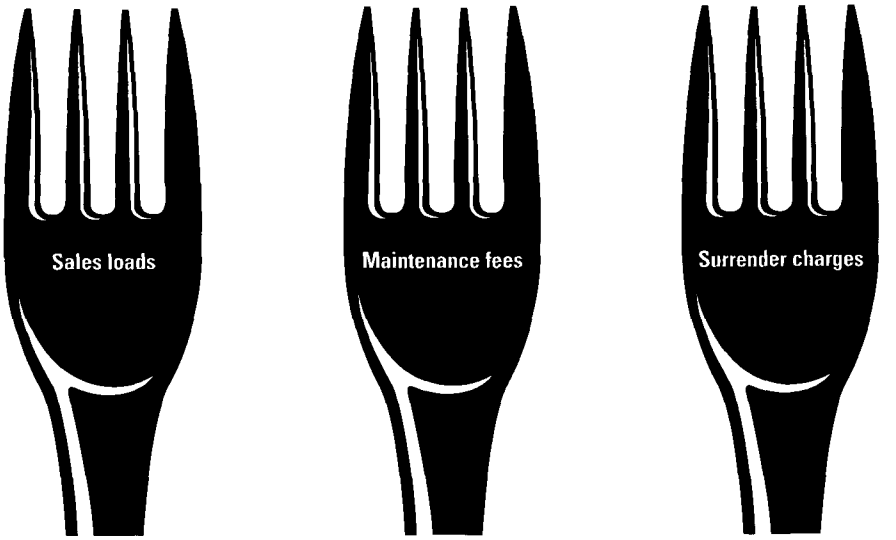


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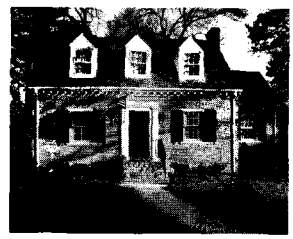

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# Say It Ain't So, Joe

THIS MAGAZINE HAS made no secret of its admiration for Joseph Lieberman. For over a decade, few Democrats have better embodied the principles we hoped would one day define the party as a whole. In particular, the Connecticut senator has been one of precious few Northern Democrats to question the party's orthodoxy on race—an orthodoxy premised on the belief that virtually any liberal principle is worth sacrificing if it keeps blacks voting for Democrats in election years and keeps them quiet in between.

So this summer, when Lieberman ditched his opposition to affirmative action and fell into the embrace of Maxine Waters at the Democratic convention, we watched with dismay. But we recognized that, as Al Gore's running mate, he had little choice but to tailor his views to the senior half of the ticket. Then, in late September, Lieberman told American Urban Radio he was prepared to meet with Louis Farrakhan. And we hoped, again naïvely, that it was a stray, ad hoc comment that he would quietly disavow, or at least not reprise.

But how can anyone rationalize Lieberman's appalling performance this Sunday on "Meet the Press"? Asked by moderator Tim Russert why he would meet with Farrakhan, Lieberman said, "Two or three people who I respect came to me ... and said, 'Louis Farrakhan would like to meet you. He's going through a crisis, he's had prostate cancer. He doesn't want to be the divisive person he's been.'" In other words, Minister Farrakhan is a new man. But doesn't Lieberman know that Farrakhan is always a new man, that supposed reinventions have long been his means of ascent? In 1984, Farrakhan's appearance at the National Press Club occasioned a column from *The Washington Post*'s Dorothy Gilliam saying, "Louis Farrakhan is a man in transition.... His style is different." In 1988, he broke bread with two Chicago rabbis, who detected "a softening of Farrakhan's tone about Jews." In 1996, he sat down for a soul-searching interview with Barbara Walters and told Arsenio Hall he would never again harbor a hateful feeling.

What is Lieberman's evidence that this latest transformation is sincere? He cited the Million Family March, noting that it "was open beyond [Farrakhan's] followers, beyond his religion." Yes, so open that it featured speakers like Wannetta Longwolf, who called the U.S. government "imperialist, capitalist, Zionist" and called Israel "the taker of the fat ... the stealer of the land." Russert noted that only two weeks ago Farrakhan reiterated his claim that "there is Jewish control over black artists and black athletes and black professionals" and asked Lieberman whether he would condition a meeting on Farrakhan's repudiation of such statements. Lieberman said he would not.

No, it turns out that whether Farrakhan has changed is really beside the point, because Lieberman has other reasons for wanting the meeting. For one thing, "there's very little risk involved." Really? It is one of the moral accomplishments of American politics that two decades after Farrakhan appeared on the national stage, meeting with him is still largely taboo. But once Lieberman does it, any politician stumping for black votes will have all the cover he or she needs. Farrakhan's 20-year campaign for respectability will finally have been successful.

But Lieberman has one last reason to meet with the leading anti-Semite in contemporary America: Judaism. "As a matter of fact," Lieberman told Russert, "it's part of my faith to believe that everybody has the capacity for change." And with that comment the Democratic running mate took his political exploitation of his religion to dizzying heights. Does he need reminding that his faith also tells him to pursue justice and to abhor untruth? And that the history of his people provides rather vivid warning of the dangers of thinking that leaders animated by hatred of Jews can be dissuaded by quiet talk and public legitimation?

We can only wonder about the other, unstated reasons Lieberman is reaching out to Farrakhan. Does the Gore campaign, fearful that having a Jew on the ticket will depress black turnout, think the solution is for that Jew to link himself to an anti-Semite? Is this some kind of hideous moral payback, whereby Lieberman's past color-blindness means he must now pay more, not less, homage to his party's worst instincts so as to prove his partisan bona fides? If so, the price is too high. This magazine remains deeply committed to the ticket on which Joseph Lieberman runs, and, of course, to the man who chose him. But the Connecticut senator seems to have forgotten that pandering is pandering, with or without God. What on earth, or in heaven, is going on? ■



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# NOTEBOOK

**MILITARY READINESS CONT'D:** It's no longer news that George W. Bush, to avoid being sent to Vietnam, enlisted in the Texas Air National Guard in 1968. Nor is it news that Bush, contrary to assertions in his 1999 campaign autobiography *A Charge to Keep*, appears not to have honored his commitment to the Guard after moving to Alabama for a period, apparently failing to report for duty there for a full year, between May 1972 and May 1973. (No one who was in the Alabama National Guard at the time recalls encountering Bush; the only person who vouches for him is a former girlfriend, who merely says Bush *spoke* of doing Guard service in Alabama.) What is news, though, is that the Bush campaign continues to lie about Bush's National Guard service. "George W. Bush served as a pilot in the Texas Air National Guard from 1968 until 1973," reads a snippet from the biography posted on the campaign's website. This is demonstrably false on two counts. For one, although Bush began his Guard service in July 1968, he spent his first two years in basic training and flight school and did not begin serving as a pilot with the 111th Fighter-Interceptor Squadron at Houston's Ellington Field until June 1970. Secondly, as has been reported in *The Boston Globe* and in these pages, after Bush moved from Texas to Alabama in May 1972, he never flew again. Nor could he, because he skipped his annual medical exam in 1972 and was suspended from flying. What had been assumed is that Bush, upon returning to Texas from Alabama in May 1973, made up for his missed service by performing nonflying duty. At least, that's what Bush campaign spokesman Dan Bartlett told reporters in June. But now it seems unlikely that Bush did even that much. According to a report in the October 31 *Boston Globe*, "a Bush campaign spokesman acknowledged last week that he knows of no witnesses who can attest to Bush's attendance at drills after he returned to Houston in late 1972 and before his early release from the Guard in September 1973." That means Bush probably skipped the final 17 months of his National Guard commitment, a period almost as long as the 22 months he served as an actual pilot. But, then again, in the early '70s W. hadn't yet ushered in "the responsibility era."

**WHY DIDN'T GROVER CLEVELAND THINK OF THAT?:** Looks like the Bushies are already preparing for the classic nightmare scenario: an electoral-college win for Gore despite a Bush victory in the popular vote. "The one thing we don't do is roll over," a Bush aide replied when the New York *Daily News* posited such a scenario this week. "We fight." The aide reportedly envisioned a national campaign involving clergy, businessmen, and radio ads, all stoking outrage that "the will of the people will have been thwarted." Even the left would be expected to join the rising tide. "You think 'Democrats for Democracy' would be a catchy term?" the aide pondered. This from the campaign of a man who consistently vows to "uphold the Constitution." Apparently that doesn't include Article 2, Section 1—that niggling little part that says, "The Electors shall meet in their respective States, and vote by Ballot.... The Person having the greatest Number of Votes shall be the President...." Maybe one of those strict constructionists Bush is always talking about appointing to the Supreme Court could help him figure it out.

**CALIFORNIA SCHEMIN':** It's no mystery why Bush was in California this week, campaigning in a state that, according to polls, he has virtually no chance of winning. By making a play—no matter how futile—for California, Bush hopes to force Gore into spending time and resources there rather than in more closely contested states. But what's harder to figure out is why Gore's fellow Democrats in California seem intent on helping Bush in this effort. "[Gore's lead is] in the low single digits," Garry South, top adviser to California Governor Gray Davis, fretted to the *Los Angeles Times* on October 17, when Gore's lead, according to a Research 2000 poll released that same day, was in fact nine points. "I'm still not happy with the fact that the Bush ads still have not been answered and that there are no plans by the Gore campaign to answer them," South continued, even though Bush and his allies had committed only $5 million for ad buys in California, a paltry sum for such a large state. Over the next two weeks, South continued his public hand-wringing even as Gore's lead held steady at seven to ten points. So why is South so worried about the veep's chances? He's not; he's worried about the rest of the Democratic ballot in the Golden State, and he's trying to bludgeon Gore into bailing it out. Although California Democrats will likely hold both houses of the state legislature, a handful of Davis's staunchest allies in the state assembly are in tight reelection fights and could use the turnout boost a presidential candidate can spark. What's more, support for Davis's cherished Proposition 39—a measure to ease passage of local school construction bonds—is hovering just above 50 percent. Meanwhile, Proposition 38, the school voucher initiative Davis opposes, might conceivably pass if voter turnout is low. These are all reasonable concerns, of course, but concerns of Davis's, not of Gore's. Still, the Gore campaign has given in to South's griping and diverted precious candidate-hours to a state their man has all but sewn up: Gore made a stop in California on October 31, and President Clinton has been dispatched to rally the troops there on November 2 and 3. At the Democratic convention in August, South said electing Gore was Davis's "number-one political priority in 2000." More like one of several.

**You Don't Say**

**Bush sees Reagan traits in self**

—*The Washington Times*, November 1, 2000



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**AND IF HE WRECKS THE ECONOMY, WE'LL GROUND HIM:** "George is prepared to be president.... George W. gets his advice from his mother. If George messes something up, Barbara will be there to straighten him out as she has before."
—Former President George Bush, addressing a campaign rally in West Virginia, October 30

**ON THE BRIGHT SIDE:** "I think he disgraced the office. He then lied about it.... He dragged it out and took a year of journalism from both of you."
—Ralph Nader, commenting to Sam Donaldson and Cokie Roberts on Bill Clinton's impeachment, October 29

**NADER SUCK-UP WATCH:** A Sampling of Principled Conservative Opinion

"How dare they tell Mr. Nader—an authentic American elder statesman—that he is unfit to run for office?... Vote Nader, I say, to all of you who love the salmon and the buffalo and the butterflies and the birds. Vote Nader, too, if you can't abide *The New York Times*."
—Tunku Varadarajan, *WallStreetJournal.com*, October 30

"The notion that Nader is meaningless because he doesn't have the official backing of groups like NARAL and the Human Rights Campaign is particularly dumb. These groups represent no one but professional fund-raisers and Washington plutocrats. If I were a leftist, I'd vote for Nader in a heartbeat."
—Andrew Sullivan, *andrewsullivan.com*, October 30

"Protest movements grow when people doing a slow burn on specific issues have no place else to go. Nader offers a healthy outlet for outrage.... [Each vote for Nader] is a voter's protest vote that says to major-party pols: don't take me for granted."
—William Safire, *The New York Times*, October 30 ■

## VINT'S WEEK

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## New York Dispatch

# Get on the Bus

*By* MICHAEL GRUNWALD

"IT'S NOT SO strange, if you think about it," says the Democratic official from upstate New York. He's referring, implausibly enough, to Hillary Rodham Clinton's Senate campaign. Let's see: The candidate had never lived or worked in New York before last year. She is married to the leader of the free world, who often flies up on Air Force One to spend the night at their house in Westchester. She is also, if memory serves, the author of a disastrous health care plan that nearly ruined her husband's presidency. Not to mention her starring role in the national psychodrama that did ruin her husband's presidency, after he fooled around with the pizza girl in the West Wing. Actually, I tell the guy, if you think about it, it does seem a bit strange.

"OK," he says. "So don't think about it."

This, in fact, is the essence of the first lady's strategy. For 16 months, she has barnstormed the state as if she were a normal Democratic candidate and not the most polarizing woman in America, visiting all 62 New York counties, kissing babies, shaking hands, making speeches, raising money. After a few amateur-hour mistakes early on—boasting that she had been to Elmira when she had only stopped by once as a teenager, flip-flopping over clemency for unrepentant Puerto Rican terrorists, kissing Suha Arafat after a vile, anti-Semitic speech—she has remained militantly on-message. She talks incessantly about The Issues That Matter To New Yorkers, ignoring questions about the health care fiasco or cattle futures or impeachment.

And it has worked. Over time, people have stopped noticing the Secret Service agents, the WHO'S YOUR HUSBAND RAPING NOW? signs, and the refrain from Tina Turner's "Simply the Best" blared over the sound system. The first lady of the United States publicly criticizing the president's foreign policy or complaining about her first home-heating bill or declaring that every day is Dolphi Day (don't ask) begins to seem routine. And Hillary's three-day bus tour through upstate New York last week—including her twenty-sixth jaunt through the Buffalo area, her twenty-third visit to Albany, and her fifteenth stop in Onandaga County—feels like the homestretch of a tight but more or less normal Senate race rather than a surreal exercise in brazen celebrity.

But it helps not to think about it.

OCTOBER 27, MORNING: ITHACA

The first lady now holds daily "press availabilities," which means that she takes questions, not that she answers them. Press availabilities are really an opportunity for her to make news with her Message of the Day, which she delivers with robotic discipline no matter what she is asked. Today, in an availability after her government plane lands at the Ithaca airport, she is outraged, shocked, and appalled by phone calls from the state Republican Party to voters, linking her campaign donations from Islamic radicals to the bombing of the USS *Cole*. As usual, we are a lot more available to her than she is to us: We could ask her about the price of milk or the narrative structure of the Starr report, and she would reply that Representative Rick Lazio owes an apology to the families of the brave American men and women who sacrificed their lives in this terrible tragedy. "These are deplorable tactics," says Clinton, wearing a Creamsicle-colored fleece jacket. "They stooped to a level I never thought we'd see ... beyond anything I've ever heard of ... a new low ... beyond the pale ... defies imagination.... They are trying to exploit the deaths of 17 young sailors for political purposes."

And so on. At her next event, a campus rally at Cornell University, she is introduced by the noted political philosopher Ben Affleck, who announces that Clinton was working to help children back when Lazio was running around fraternity houses in his underwear and that people like Lazio produced the slogan "No Irish Need Apply." (The fact that Lazio's wife is Irish seems not to have crossed Affleck's steel trap of a mind.) The first lady gushes that Affleck is wonderful, then launches into a youth-oriented version of her upstate stump speech, heavy on tuition tax credits, hate-crime laws, and abortion rights, as well as her plan to create 200,000 jobs for the slumping upstate economy. She finishes by reminding the students of their civic obligation to vote, and she lowers her voice as she notes that some Americans give their lives to defend this great country—Americans like, you guessed it, the 17 young men and women killed on the USS *Cole*. Whose memorial service she attended with the president and Chelsea. Whose families she met and comforted. And so on.

"We need to honor their memory by exercising our most sacred right, the right to vote," she says. It's a riff she'll repeat this afternoon in Elmira and again this evening in West Seneca. It almost sounds like she's trying to exploit the deaths of 17 young sailors for political purposes—but only if you think about it.

OCTOBER 28, AFTERNOON: ABOARD HILLARY'S BUS

This is the big moment, availability-wise: We're meeting with the first lady! She's scrapped her plan to see us one-on-one, but we do get to interview her in groups of five or six. My group plots some great questions that we know will knock her off message. Except, of course, they don't.

The first question refers to last week's debate, when Clinton was asked if she had ever taken an unpopular stand, and she cited her proposal to test teachers in Arkansas. So: Have you taken any unpopular stands during *this* campaign? "Well, after the election, I'll have to evaluate that." *D'oh*!

The next question: If you say the government should declassify secret evidence against Israeli spy Jonathan Pollard, what about Arab-Americans detained on secret evidence? "I'd want to look at that very closely. I'm very concerned about some of those other cases." Which cases?

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She won't say.

Then it's my turn: You've been a top presidential adviser for eight years. Can you give an example of an issue where you persuaded the president to change his mind? "I don't talk about private conversations I have with the president." OK, whatever. So what about your public issue, the health care plan? Do you stand by the substance of the plan?

She responds (if that's the word) that aspects of the plan spurred reforms, that she has a plan for New York, that this race is not about the past. And so on. My notes say: "Grrrrrr." Then a bit later: "Zzzzzzz." She's good.

OCTOBER 29, MORNING: SCHENECTADY

It is certainly possible to think about the first lady's campaign the same way you'd think about any other candidate's. On policy, for example, she's basically running as a New York New Democrat, parroting the administration's positions, except for home-state pork and harder-line support for Israel—the same positions any other Democrat would take to get elected here. Of course, any other Democrat would also be running on (or against) her own record, and Hillary's record consists mostly of . . . a health plan she refuses to discuss and advice to her husband she refuses to reveal.

The problem with thinking too much about this campaign is that it can lead to headaches and irritability. I say this in defense of my rude behavior at the first lady's last availability of her upstate swing, outside a delicatessen in a city that never really recovered after General Electric started turning out the lights. The Message of the Day is that Lazio somehow does not deserve credit for his own breast-cancer bill, but I am determined to grill her about, of all things, farm policy. She's been agri-pandering all over the region, pledging more help for New York farmers, even though farm subsidies are at an all-time high. "Mrs. Clinton, do you have any plan for agriculture other than more money, more money, more money?"

I don't know why I repeated it three times. But the first lady's conflicting responses do illustrate why her campaign makes my head explode. "In New York, we have mostly family farms," she says at first. "We don't have large corporate farming. My understanding of the farm policy in Washington is that it's mostly aimed at the large farming and ranching interests. I think family farms need more help."

To a geek like me, that's pretty strong stuff. It sounds as if she wants to take on Big Grain. "Mrs. Clinton, does that mean you'll stand up to Senator Daschle and the other Democrats who represent grain farmers?"

Why, no, not at all. "Oh, I think there's room for all kinds of farming," she says. "Grain farmers and cattle ranchers, you know, need help from time to time, and I don't have any objection to that." (Sure, if "from time to time" means "every year since the New Deal.") She goes on: "It's important that we support agriculture throughout the country. I'm not asking to take something away from the rest of the country. I'm asking the rest of the country to recognize that agriculture is still the leading industry in New York."

Which boils down to: more money, more money, more money. If you really think about it. ■

**The historian as pundit.**

# Past Prime

*By* NOAM SCHEIBER

WHEN THE DUST clears on November 7, history will record a handful of lasting images from this year's election: Al Gore's convention kiss, George W. Bush's proctological epithet about a *New York Times* reporter, the word "rats" flashing momentarily across a TV screen, and, well, Michael Beschloss.

In the last few months, the well-coiffed historian turned commentator has become a virtual one-man news cycle, appearing on the tube some 40 times since the Republican convention. It's not hard to see why. Realizing that the term "pundit" increasingly denotes opinion that is flip, ephemeral, and shallow, talk-show hosts and producers—particularly at the prestige networks—have looked for commentators with more heft. Commentators with deeper knowledge, commentators able to step back from the rush of events and see the big picture. Historians! And Beschloss, it turns out, is a pretty good popular historian. His 1991 book *The Crisis Years* was a compelling reinterpretation of cold war foreign policy: scrupulously researched (more than 100,000 pages of documents and 1,500 secondary sources in the making), subtle in its attention to detail, and yet highly readable, even suspenseful in spots.

But the skills that make Beschloss a good historian have nothing to do with the skills that make him a successful pundit. Beschloss became a good historian by doing the same thing all good historians do: sifting through documentary evidence and carefully disentangling chains of causation. But on television, reacting to a debate or a speech or a poll minutes after it takes place, Beschloss doesn't do any of that. Indeed, he himself admits it's "absolutely impossible." Instead, he sprinkles his political handicapping with anecdotes from past campaigns and facile historical analogies (W. as Ronald Reagan, Gore as Hubert Humphrey, Joe Lieberman as JFK). Meanwhile, Larry King introduces Beschloss as the "famed" and "noted" presidential historian; Peter Jennings praises him as our "resident historian who gives us such a great sense of history"; Cokie Roberts notes that "Michael is normally devoting himself to history, but a little present-day is a good thing." Beschloss, in short, has figured out how to appeal perfectly to producers and hosts who want the aura of a serious historian without the substance. That's hardly a crime. But it isn't history, either.

Beschloss's emergence as America's preeminent telehistorian had improbable beginnings. After graduating from Williams College in 1977 with a bachelor's degree in political science, Beschloss went to Harvard to do graduate work—not in history but in business. Still, he spent the next few years revising his undergraduate thesis on the relationship between FDR and Joe Kennedy. With the help of his



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former adviser, historian James MacGregor Burns, he published the manuscript in 1980.

The modest success of *Kennedy and Roosevelt* allowed Beschloss to postpone his intended career as a foundation chairman in favor of a second project on the 1960 U-2 spy plane incident. But his big break came in the late '80s. CNN was beginning its around-the-clock news coverage, and producer Gail Evans decided that reporting of the Reagan-Gorbachev summits could benefit from historical analysis. When Evans, who had also studied with Burns, mentioned the idea to her former professor, he suggested Beschloss.

Beschloss's debut opposite anchors Reed Collins and Bernard Shaw during a 1987 summit created an instant splash—a splash due as much to Beschloss's good looks and poise as to his grasp of historical detail. The network was so impressed that it brought Beschloss back repeatedly: for later summits and then during coverage of presidential elections and inaugurations. In 1994 Beschloss, fellow historian Doris Kearns Goodwin, and journalist Haynes Johnson began providing regular historical perspective on what was then "The MacNeil-Lehrer News Hour." As "News Hour" producer Lester Crystal recalls, "We thought it went so well with what the show's all about in terms of providing depth and context."

With the "News Hour" segment gaining popularity, other networks sought out historians to quiet critics who derided their talk shows as mindless. Soon people like FDR biographer Goodwin and Boston University Professor Robert Dallek began doing the talk-show circuit. But none of them has achieved as much success as Beschloss. For one thing, they're a little frumpy. (By contrast, Jay Leno calls Beschloss "the handsomest political historian I've ever seen.") For another, their academic ties make them less willing to propose simple historical analogies. (Asked about historical parallels to the Clinton impeachment trial, for instance, Goodwin said on the "News Hour" in October 1998 that there was no clear precedent and condemned people who look for "an analogy to something that bolsters their own case.") But while Dallek and Goodwin sometimes struggle (often unsuccessfully) to show the limits of analogy, Beschloss freely uses it as a cover for gossip.

Take his commentary on Clinton's stage-hogging during the Democratic convention. "Even the fact this convention is here in Los Angeles ... is what [Clinton's] wanted for years," Beschloss revealed. "He watched the Los Angeles convention of John Kennedy in 1960 as a boy, loved it, tried to get it here in 1996, couldn't do it. So everyone who's here knows that the reason we're all in Los Angeles is not Al Gore but Bill Clinton." Or on the parallels between Lieberman and JFK: "President Kennedy, he had sort of a sense of humor about [his Catholicism]. He used to say during the 1960 campaign, 'If you want to know how many people are in my crowds, count the number of nuns and multiply it by 100,' which is sort of funny."

And sometimes there's no historical gloss at all. After successfully predicting that Dick Cheney would be Bush's running mate, ABC's "resident historian" revealed his winning methodology. Had he distilled a trend from past selections? Not really. "I actually saw Dick Cheney on the evening of the Fourth of July.... He was going around schmoozing with political figures and journalists," Beschloss explained. "And I actually turned to my wife and I said, 'My God, he's running for vice president.'"

Increasingly, Beschloss, who is ostensibly on television because of his ability as a historian, not only doesn't put that ability to use on the tube; he barely puts it to use at all. *The Crisis Years* was his last significant work of scholarship. Since 1990, he's co-written a book on the cold war with Strobe Talbott, authored a flawed transcription of the *LBJ* tapes, and provided what are essentially captions for the coffee-table book *Eisenhower: A Centennial Life*. Just out is *The American Heritage Illustrated History of the Presidents*, destined for a junior high school near you. Punditry's gain is looking more and more like history's loss. ■

STEVE BROMER

**Republican moderates get mean.**

# Burying the Hatchet

*By* MICHAEL CROWLEY

As if this race weren't strange enough. Last week, a Republican soft money group began running an attack ad against Al Gore starring ... Ralph Nader! The ad, which aired in toss-up states like Wisconsin and Oregon, features Nader angrily denouncing Gore's environmental record and scoffing at "eight years of principles betrayed and promises broken." The ad closes ominously, with a plaintive female voice imploring, "Ask Al Gore why."



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As underhanded campaign tactics go, the ad wasn't terribly surprising. After all, the only way George W. Bush can win states like Oregon and Wisconsin is if Nader peels off enough votes from Gore. More surprising, though, is the group behind the ad: the Republican Leadership Council (RLC). Modeled on the influential Democratic Leadership Council (DLC)—which in the 1980s challenged the Democratic Party by crafting alternative, centrist policies—the RLC was supposed to offer a serious, independent-minded challenge to the GOP establishment. Instead, it has become just another arm of that establishment—more interested in sucker punching its challengers than in presenting a creative, or even coherent, agenda of ideas.

BANKROLLED BY MODERATE Republican sugar daddies like New York financier Henry Kravis and Seagram CEO Edgar Bronfman, the RLC was launched to much fanfare in 1997. The list of its advisory board members reads like a who's who of the GOP's kinder and gentler wing: Christie Todd Whitman, John Engler, Pete Wilson, Bill Weld. As Kravis told *The New York Times* in a story heralding the RLC's formation, "[The GOP was] starting to become ... the party in which, if you didn't believe in the far right, there was no room for you." The RLC pledged to counteract the Christian right and promote racial diversity within the GOP.

For a while, it tried. In early 1998 the group mounted an advertising campaign against a right-wing effort to cut off national party funding to any candidate opposed to a ban on "partial-birth" abortion. The RLC also intervened in Republican primaries, typically on behalf of pro-choicers battling anti-abortion opponents. A foundation closely affiliated with the group, for instance, spent $100,000 in 1998 helping to block radical abortion activist Randall Terry's primary bid for a New York congressional seat.

But the lofty goals were short-lived. By the time the current election cycle rolled around, the RLC was specializing in ad hominem attacks and dirty campaign tricks. In a GOP primary to fill Florida Representative Bill McCollum's seat, for instance, the RLC ran an ad attacking one of the candidates for "getting help from" the Democrats; *The Orlando Sentinel* subsequently blasted the ad as "bizarre" and "misleading." In New Jersey, the RLC has doled out $1 million for personal attacks on Democrat Jon Corzine. And in New York, where the RLC has spent another $1 million backing Representative Rick Lazio's Senate campaign, the group ran an ad incorrectly suggesting that Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan supported Lazio's bid; the spot was widely condemned, and even RLC steering committee member Bronfman called it "fraudulent" and "deceptive."

But the RLC's defining moment came during the GOP presidential primaries, when it flooded New Hampshire and Iowa airwaves with $100,000 in commercials warning that an anticipated ad blitz against Bush by Steve Forbes could ruin the GOP's White House prospects. "That's just going to help the Democrats," one spot explained. "Someone needs to tell Steve Forbes that if he doesn't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all." On their face, at least, the ads seemed in line with the RLC's stated agenda of moderation and fair play. Justifying its criticism of Forbes, the RLC declared that it "firmly believes that all GOP candidates should talk about and promote a positive agenda on the issues, as opposed to tearing down fellow Republican candidates."

But, after the New Hampshire primary, the RLC kept conspicuously quiet while a panicky Bush brutalized John McCain with a slew of attack ads. The RLC's silence during the McCain-Bush battle didn't simply undermine its lofty declarations about fair play; it also contradicted the group's supposed mission of moving the GOP to the center. McCain, after all, with his smaller tax cut and challenge to the religious right, was just the kind of Republican the RLC was founded to help. Instead, the group stood up not for its professed ideology but for the party establishment—first attacking Forbes on Bush's behalf and then keeping mum while Bush eviscerated McCain. The RLC, says the Hudson Institute's Marshall Whitman, who advised McCain during the primary, was "critical in the whole coronation" of Bush. "It was what the RNC could not do for the big-money people in the party. [The RLC] didn't have to maintain the patina of neutrality that the RNC was obligated to have."

The DLC once participated in a coronation as well. But by the time Bill Clinton had risen to lead his party, the DLC had spent a decade engineering a high-profile and deeply controversial political makeover, infusing its party with new policy ideas like welfare reform, the Earned Income Tax Credit, and national service. If the RLC ever seriously considered such a mission, it has completely abandoned it by now. It has become not the Republicans' public conscience but their silent enforcer. When told that his group merited a profile because it isn't very well-known, RLC Executive Director Mark Miller chuckled. "We're as well-known," he said, "as we want to be." ■

## Why everybody thinks Bush is winning.

# Confidence Game

*By* JONATHAN CHAIT

IF YOU TUNED in to the presidential race this final week, you probably read that George W. Bush is winning. "Bush exuded confidence as he made his way west yesterday," reported *The Washington Post*, in a typical account. Bush's "confidence" has stood in sharp contrast to Al Gore, who has invariably been described in news reports as "frantic" and "desperate." These are all code words reporters use to transmit a sense of who's winning the horse race. And, as the feeling that Bush was pulling away permeated the political class, conservatives began to gloat, and liberals reverted to their cherished habit



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of preparing vicious recriminations for the inevitable defeat.

The problem is, the evidence that Bush is winning isn't that strong. Yes, for more than a week he has maintained a small but consistent lead in national polls. But national polls don't necessarily reflect the true state of the race. In an electoral-college system—in which it doesn't matter if a candidate wins a state by one vote or one million—Bush's huge advantages in the South and the mountain states are essentially wasted votes. Gore, meanwhile, is pulling close—or even slightly ahead—in the battleground states. Polls this week have even shown him surging ahead in Florida and perhaps leading slightly in Michigan and Pennsylvania. If I were betting on the popular vote, I'd choose Bush. But in the electoral college it's still a toss-up.

So why do journalists and talking heads keep saying Bush is headed for victory? Partly because the Bush campaign keeps telling them so. In the past, chief Bush strategist Karl Rove has said he believes that in the final days before an election, a bandwagon effect takes over. And, since its inception, Bush's campaign has carefully cultivated its front-runner image—in the belief that acting like a winner can become a self-fulfilling prophesy. When Bush picked Dick Cheney as his running mate, his advisers clearly hoped the fact that the former defense secretary brought no swing state and no voting bloc would be interpreted not as a liability but as a sign of strength. And, among the press and the politicos, it generally was. "Bush is confident enough of victory over Al Gore," wrote E.J. Dionne in *The Washington Post*, "that he has pushed aside the obvious political factors so he'll have a chance of governing in tandem with an intelligent and faithful adviser." Today, Team Bush is trying that confidence game again, and once again it's working with the Fourth Estate. But there's less evidence it's working with the people who matter: the voters.

THIS WEEK'S STRONGEST sign that Bush thinks he'll win, according to the press, was his trip to California. While Gore was spending the campaign's last week in his home state of Tennessee and on traditionally Democratic terrain like Oregon, Minnesota, and West Virginia, Bush was indulging in the unimaginable luxury of visiting what is considered an overwhelmingly Democratic state.

Surely, the press reasoned, this was evidence Bush was going to win. "[F]or Bush, the trip yesterday was an important display of confidence in the final hour," *The Boston Globe* dutifully reported from Burbank, "a yardstick by which voters could measure how well he is doing elsewhere, strategic proof that Gore's back is against the wall." CNN's "Crossfire" used Bush's trip as an occasion to devote an entire show to the question "Can Bush win this Democratic stronghold?" And reporters endlessly said polls in the Golden State were tightening, when in fact they held steady, with Gore leading by seven to ten points for close to a week. The objective evidence paled before the overwhelming psychological proof of Bush's confidence.

And, by the media's logic, if Bush's trip to a state where he was behind meant he was confident—which meant he was winning—then Gore's visits to states where the two were running neck and neck meant he was nervous and therefore losing. For most of this crucial week, that has been the framework in which much of the vice president's behavior has been understood. So when the Gore campaign attacked Bush's preparedness for office, many news stories suggested it was a sign of desperation, even though Bush's assault on Gore's veracity was never interpreted the same way. "All of the horrible negative stuff that Gore does," says Republican pollster Bill McInturff, "gets filtered through the lens of desperation."

And there is indeed some psychological literature to support the Bush campaign's strategy. The German psychologist Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann posited a "spiral of silence," according to which people who believe they hold a minority opinion grow less likely to express it openly—a process that builds upon itself. The problem with applying this theory to the campaign, however, is that, as Democratic pollster Mark Mellman observes, "it's decidedly untrue." In fact, the theory has already failed Bush at least once this year. The day before February's New Hampshire primary, for instance, as his rivals frantically crisscrossed the state, Bush was photographed frolicking in the snow. The next day, of course, Bush was trounced by John McCain.

What's more, in the final days of past presidential elections, undecided voters have actually moved toward the candidate who appeared to be *trailing*. Richard Nixon rose at the end of the 1960 campaign, as did Hubert Humphrey in 1968, Gerald Ford in 1976, and Ronald Reagan in 1980. Gore could well lose, but if he pulls out a close win, Bush's California trip may be remembered as a colossal blunder. After all, he could have spent his time in states that were actually close in the polls rather than simply close in his head. ■

## Campaign Journal

# Bait and Switch

*By* MICHELLE COTTLE

MANCHESTER, NEW HAMPSHIRE

THE TWINKLE IS gone. It was one of the most appealing things about Joe Lieberman: the impish spark behind those boyish blue eyes. It kept the senator—not a particularly fiery or inspirational orator—from seeming pompous or tedious. It made him appear to be enjoying the work he was doing, the speeches he was giving, the people he was schmoozing. But, sometime late in this grueling campaign, the twinkle fizzled, and on this cold and rainy Halloween, one week from Election Day, Lieberman looks depressingly shrunken. Delivering his remarks on promoting prosperity in the new economy to a crowd of about 200, the senator still smiles frequently. He even retains some of his trademark fidgeting. But his gestures are smaller and fainter now, and his chipmunk cheeks sag a little lower. He still sprinkles his speech with jokes, but his laughter seems an exhausted exhalation. Most telling, Lieberman's eyes are too weary to dance



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as he relates what a magical, mystical journey this campaign has been for him. "I've been out here now eleven weeks plus, and it's hard to believe that there are only seven days until Election Day," he tells the audience. And as he says the words, his voice low and sleepy, it's hard to tell whether the senator is feeling disbelief, anticipation—or just plain relief. The grinding pressure of this last leg of the campaign, which has made Al Gore increasingly frenetic, has leached the pep from Lieberman. The eerie result is that, more and more, this run-down running mate is trading places with his taciturn Republican counterpart, Dick Cheney.

Coming out of the starting gate, Lieberman was the rock star of this race, his selection praised for both its historic import (the Jewish thing) and its political wisdom (the character thing). Gore's decision to go with Joe, raved *The New York Times* in an August 8 editorial, "is certainly the most dramatic move he has made in his presidential campaign, and may turn out to be one of the smartest." *The Washington Post* dubbed Lieberman "the last happy warrior." Even the Bush folk limited themselves to the halfhearted criticism that the senator was ideologically closer to their candidate than to Gore.

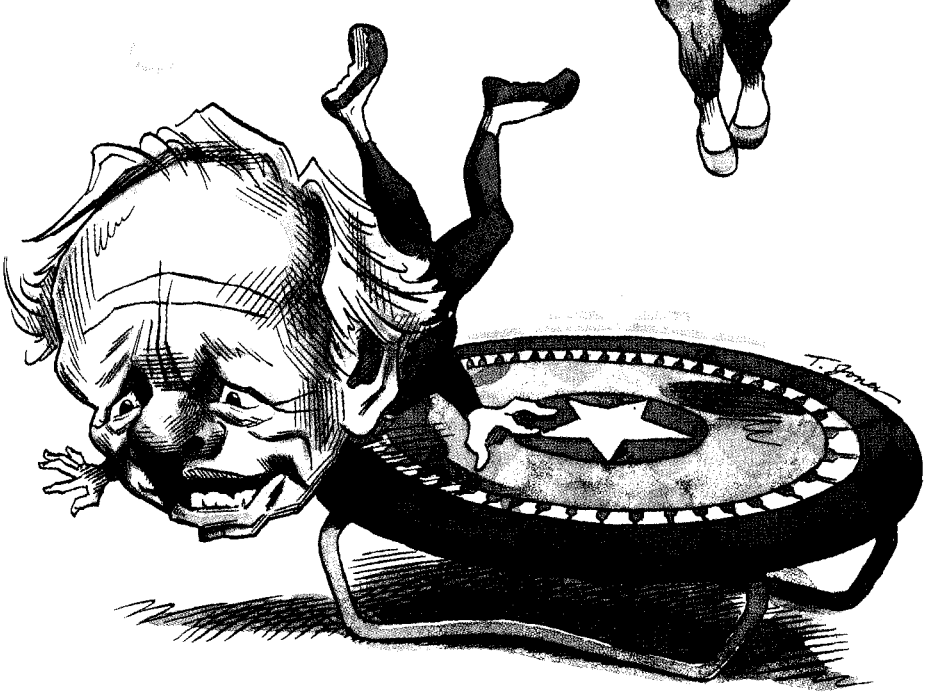
Cheney, by contrast, took an early drubbing in the press. There was his reluctance to give up millions in unvested stock options from Halliburton, followed by grumbling about the eye-popping $20 million retirement package he received from the company. Pundits sniped about how little Cheney gives to charity and about his failure to vote in many past elections—including this year's presidential primary. All of which prompted questions about whether the guy in charge of vetting Bush's veep candidates had been properly vetted himself. Most notably, there was Cheney's performance on the trail. He was, to put it gently, a disaster. He looked not just bored but actively unhappy to be interacting with the groping, grasping public. He didn't much like talking about education or health care or Social Security—or anything, really, that didn't give him the opportunity to rehash his Gulf war glory. If Lieberman was the election's happy warrior, Cheney was its grumpy general, irritated and amazed that he was being forced to suffer the indignities of a campaign.

But then the wheel turned. These days, Lieberman is the one enduring a public thrashing—from the media, from some in the Jewish community, and even from within his own party—while Cheney floats along unmolested (if basically unnoticed). Naturally, many Lieberman fans blame their guy's woes on a bored press looking to stir up trouble—much as Cheney fans did early on. But the real issue is the initial expectations the media created for each man, and who has met (or failed to meet) them.

Cheney's rehabilitation began shortly after he endured a wave of media bashing (in which this correspondent happily participated) for his anti-electric stump style. Though still reserved, the candidate began perking up enough to make the dailies note that he was "making adjustments," "loosening up," becoming "more accessible." He even danced a polka at one campaign stop.

But the real shift came in the wake of the vice presidential debate. Going in, expectations for Cheney were low—lower even than they had been for Bush. Even Republicans seemed to expect the gregarious Lieberman to wipe the floor with the dour Cheney. But, by the end of the 90 minutes, pretty much everyone agreed that the Republican had stolen the show. His low-key style worked well in the round-table format. He sounded reasonable and (especially compared to his running mate) confidence-inspiring in discussing everything from budget surpluses to racial profiling. He even came across as more liberal than Lieberman on the issue of gay marriage (which got him into just enough trouble with right-wingers to boost his stock with everyone else). But the real shocker was that Cheney was actually more entertaining than Lieberman. His wit was sharper and less rehearsed, his timing better. Since that night, Cheney has enjoyed a much smoother ride. Even Halliburton's recent projects in Burma, where the military is known to use forced labor, have done little to fire up the Fourth Estate, and it looks as if the secretary will coast through the rest of this race unaccosted.

For Lieberman, however, the spotlight has grown progressively more scorching. Not surprisingly, his overt religiosity has proved



TAYLOR JONES



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a mixed blessing. While probably a winner on the stump, it has gone over like a lead balloon with journalists, liberals, and even many Jewish organizations. In late August, the Anti-Defamation League issued an official request for Lieberman to cool it with the God talk, after which ADL Director Abraham Foxman noted to *The New York Times*, "There's nothing wrong with somebody professing their faith and going to church or synagogue, but this is hawking it." Lieberman's willingness to meet with, and his "respect for," the viciously anti-Semitic Louis Farrakhan has caused an even louder outcry (see "Say It Ain't So, Joe," page 9). Over the course of the campaign, Lieberman has shed the very policy stances that initially earned him the description "bipartisan"—opposition to affirmative action and support for school vouchers, tort reform, and Social Security privatization. It came as a particular shock to Lieberman's admirers to see the senator, long a fierce critic of Hollywood filth, yukking it up at fund-raisers thrown by the industry's elite.

Finally, Lieberman has enraged many in his party with his refusal to step aside and let another Democrat run for his Senate seat in Connecticut—a decision that could conceivably cost his party control of the Senate. "A lot of Democrats up on the Hill are angry," says one minority staffer. "And a lot are furious—and have been since at least September." For a while, the staffer notes, some Dems clung to the hope that Lieberman was simply waiting until the last minute to leave the race so he could make a dramatic announcement close to Election Day about how confident he was of victory. But the deadline for withdrawal passed just days before Halloween—and with it all hopes that Lieberman would do the right thing.

There are, granted, explanations for many of Lieberman's actions. *Of course* he's soft-pedaling pet issues like Hollywood filth, says a White House staffer: "The press has been rough on Lieberman because he's been doing his job—promoting the top of the ticket and its policies, even if it means putting some of his past positions in the backseat." And *of course* Lieberman didn't want to relinquish his Senate seat with the presidential race so close. "He's done so much for the ticket's chances, and he has to fall on his sword, too?" the staffer asks.

LIEBERMAN'S REAL PROBLEM, ironically, is that the media celebrated all his early talk about God and character and difficult choices and bipartisanship so uncritically when he was chosen that it forgot that he is first and foremost a politician—and an ambitious one at that. And now the pundits feel foolish and betrayed. "He's the real disappointment of 2000," political analyst Stuart Rothenberg said of Lieberman in an October 17 article in *USA Today*. "You expected Al Gore to exaggerate and embellish. You expected George Bush to stagger around when foreign policy came up and stumble over words. But I didn't expect Joe Lieberman to be acting like every other politician on the planet."

By contrast, people like Rothenberg basically expected Cheney to be a grim, scandal-ridden sleep inducer, and so his early media drubbing made late campaign bouquets from the press almost inevitable. Like W., Cheney is benefiting from the national scourge both men have pledged to do away with: "the soft bigotry of low expectations." ■

**Why you can put a price tag on the environment.**

# Green Values

*By* GREGG EASTERBROOK

THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION isn't the only important political event taking place on November 7: The Supreme Court will spend that day hearing challenges to the Clean Air Act. The American Trucking Association (ATA), opposed to pending regulations designed to reduce smog-causing ozone and soot, has sued the Environmental Protection Agency, saying the new rules are unreasonable because costs would exceed benefits. The EPA responds that federal courts—including the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals, in this case—have repeatedly held that the agency cannot consider the cost to business when designing air-pollution rules. And environmental groups don't want that to change. "It is crucial ... that costs not be used as a pretext for weak standards," argued Howard Fox of Earthjustice Legal Defense Fund, which filed a Supreme Court brief opposing the ATA's position.

To maximize everyone's confusion, the Supreme Court is hearing the cost-benefit question in conjunction with another lawsuit—also by the ATA and also involving the Clean Air Act—on a legal principle called the "delegation doctrine." But, because the Court is not expected to sympathize with the delegation-doctrine suit, the real action lies with the cost-benefit issue.

So if the ATA wins and the Court rules that cost-benefit analysis can be used in Clean Air Act policy, will it be the beginning of the end of clean air? Hardly. In fact, the effectiveness of the act might actually improve. Most people, first and foremost the truckers, assume that introducing cost-benefit analysis into environmental regulation would merely save money. But, as strong evidence now shows, cost-benefit analysis can also reduce pollution and protect public health.

Whether the drafters of the Clean Air Act meant to authorize the EPA to use cost-benefit thinking is a subject we can leave for the justices to duke out. The original 1970 act says air pollution must be cut with "an adequate margin of safety" for public health. Courts have tended to read this as meaning all cuts are justified regardless of expense, though the legislative history of the act suggests Congress assumed the EPA would balance rules against costs. Basically, it's a muddle.

Still, while the EPA officially insists it doesn't take expense into account—"Costs of meeting the [air pollution] standards have never been considered," EPA chief Carol Browner said in 1997—as a practical matter Browner, a conscientious administrator, thinks about costs constantly. Bill Clinton, like every president since Ronald Reagan, has instructed the EPA to perform cost-benefit checks of proposed rules. But although these reviews, called Regulatory Impact Analyses (RIAs), use cost-benefit data, they don't take advantage of



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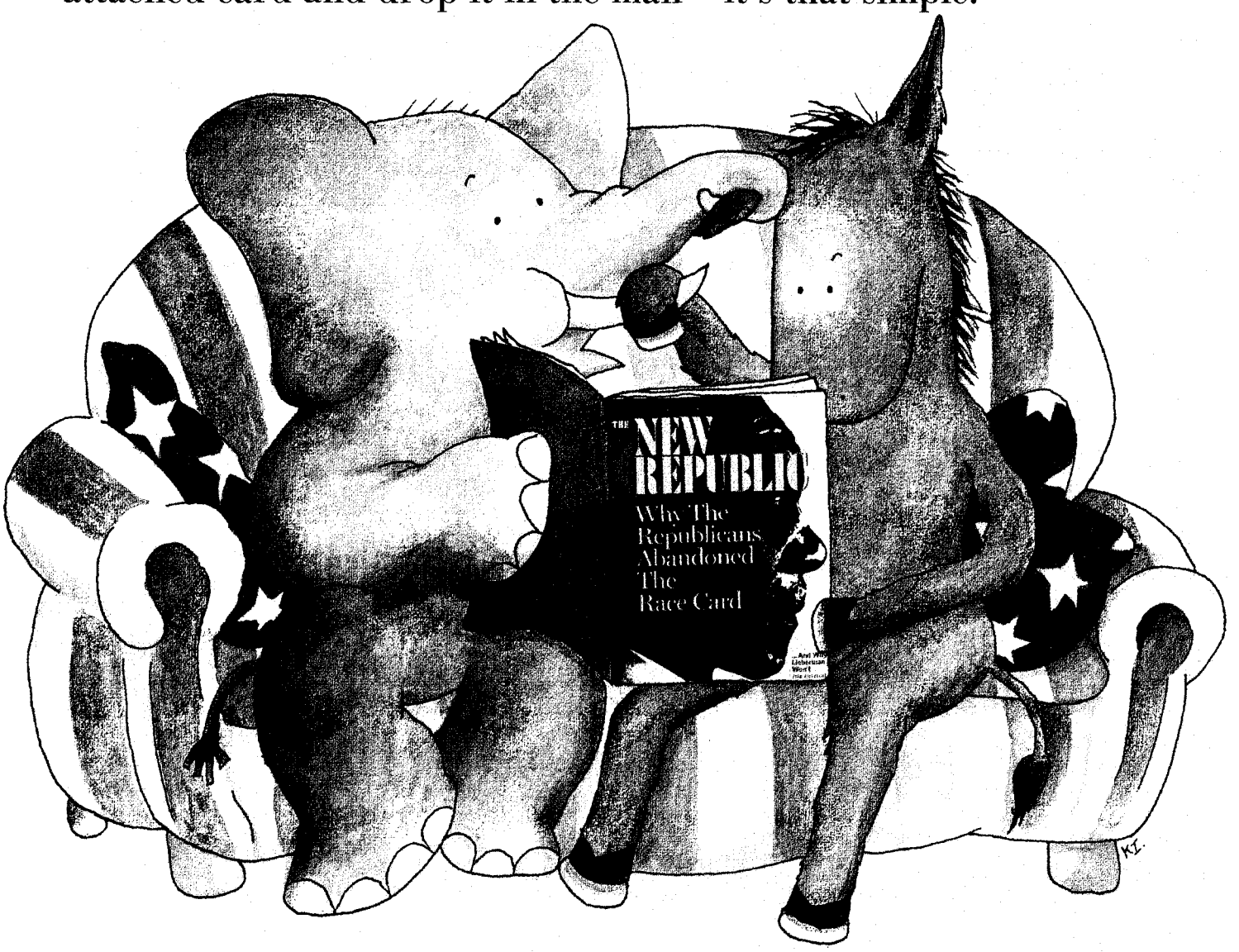


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the method's true value. Each RIA considers each proposed rule as a thing unto itself, rather than trying to figure out where public investments produce the greatest returns. That's the essence of cost-benefit analysis, and it is currently missing from most environmental law.

That's a shame, partly because cost-benefit tests often show how worthwhile many environmental rules are. America spends, by the EPA's estimates, about $50 billion a year to comply with the Clean Air Act. Yet according to a report by Terry Davies and Jan Mazurek of Resources for the Future, a nonpartisan think tank with a reputation for hardheaded economic analysis, federal air-pollution rules have since their inception generated at least $12 billion more per year in benefits than they have cost. Estimates using more liberal assumptions put the number as high as the trillions since the law was passed.

It's not hard to see why. Since the Clean Air Act's passage in 1970, smog has declined by one-third and acid rain by one-half. The benefits have included higher quality of urban life, record agricultural production (ground-level ozone hurts crops), and reduced respiratory disease. Credible estimates suggest that as many as 45,000 deaths, about 2 percent of all American deaths in a given year, are prevented by air-pollution control. Nor have these controls handicapped the economy. When Congress strengthened the Clean Air Act in 1990, conservative lobbies widely predicted a "clean-air recession." Instead GDP boomed as never before.

But cost-benefit analysis can do more than simply bolster the environmental controls already in place; it can also improve them. As regulatory analyst Cass Sunstein of the University of Chicago points out, just because the Clean Air Act generates benefits does not mean it is economically efficient. Rules set using better economic logic might achieve superior results, or the same results at lower cost. Consider the acid-rain permit-trading program, which the 1990 bill established as a test case of allowing cost-benefit analysis and market rules. In lieu of top-heavy regulation, power plants were granted permission to trade emissions permits for acid-rain chemicals. When the program went into effect, the permits were expected to trade for about $1,000 per ton of chemicals. But that price has steadily fallen, and they now trade for about $100 per ton. This means the market has found it can cut acid rain for about one-tenth the projected cost; the money freed up can go for other things, including other forms of environmental protection. And, because we are reducing acid rain more cheaply, this form of pollution declined more rapidly during the '90s than the Clean Air Act projected, even as combustion of coal, the main source of acid rain, kept increasing.

IF ECONOMIC THINKING worked for acid rain, why shouldn't it be spread to other areas of environmental regulation? In the case before the Supreme Court, the question is whether cost-benefit analysis can apply to new EPA proposals that would make some smog rules about 50 percent stricter and anti-soot regulations about four times as strict.

Cost-benefit reasoning supports the anti-soot rules. In the late '80s, a Brigham Young University economist named C. Arden Pope III conducted a landmark study of the relationship between hospital admissions and soot emissions in a Utah valley downwind from a steel mill. Since then public health researchers have grown increasingly convinced that invisible or "fine" soot is a significant cause of respiratory disease, including acute asthma. This summer the widely respected Health Effects Institute, which is jointly administered by the EPA and industry groups, endorsed the Pope study and similar research, estimating that hundreds or even thousands of lives could be saved each year through stricter regulation of industrial soot. Most analysts now accept that tougher soot standards would produce benefits that exceed costs.

The cost-benefit case for the stricter smog rules, however, is not as strong. According to most research, the health effects of current exposure to smog are real but mild: Smog may contribute to mild asthma cases, but, according to the Clinton administration's own RIA on the new rules, it causes a few premature deaths annually at most, and perhaps none. What's more, smog levels are already declining almost everywhere, even in Houston. Los Angeles, which as recently as the 1970s averaged more than 100 "Stage One" smog alerts per summer, just celebrated its second consecutive summer without a single such alert. The administration's own RIA for the new smog rules found that they would cost an additional $9.6 billion per year but return only $8.5 billion in benefits.

The EPA, in short, might get better results by focusing more on soot and less on smog. But the ban on cost-benefit analysis essentially prohibits it from doing so. That's why an astral lineup of economists, ranging from liberal Nobel Prize-winners Kenneth Arrow and Robert Solow to conservative Nobel laureate Milton Friedman, recently signed a friend-of-the-court brief, jointly sponsored by the Brookings Institution and the American Enterprise Institute, urging the Supreme Court to allow cost-benefit thinking in Clean Air Act rules.

But, despite objections from economists across the ideological spectrum, cost-benefit analysis remains barred—not only because of furious and predictable opposition from many environmental lobbies, but also because many lawmakers remain uncomfortable with the idea, often implicit in cost-benefit reasoning, of placing a dollar value on human life. The reality, though, is that we make life/money trade-offs constantly. After all, if the national speed limit were 20 miles per hour, traffic deaths would be all but eliminated. But not one person in 1,000 would vote for such a plan, because the cost to people's time and economic productivity would be too great.

Indeed, there is no harm in putting a value on life for the purpose of rational public policy, as long as the value chosen is high—and that's already the case. Using tools such as estimates of future earnings, economists today, when crafting regulatory policy, usually place the value of an American life at around $8 million; many federal regulations are set using this dollar figure or more as the amount that should be spent to avoid a single death. At $8 million each, the 265 million Americans are worth $2.1 quadrillion, or about 200 years of current GDP. So, yes, the cost-benefit approach places a value on human life, but it's a generous one.

Yet according to studies by Kip Viscusi of Harvard Law School, who has worked on EPA advisory panels, "Almost



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every regulation coming out of EPA and OSHA today has a cost per life saved greater than $50 million.... At that point, people's health would be better if you had no additional regulations and simply left the money in their pockets, allowing them to purchase the normal basket of consumer goods—health care, higher living standards, and so on." Indeed, according to Viscusi's estimates, once the cost per life saved hits around $20 million, regulations actively damage public health by limiting the prosperity that buys health care, anti-pollution technology, and other benefits, such as land for preservation.

Beyond this, because environmental officials can't trade benefits and costs among different programs, environmental regulations are applied unevenly—or nonsensically. As Randall Lutter and Elizabeth Mader of the American Enterprise Institute–Brookings Joint Center point out, the EPA's lead standard for abandoned toxic waste sites is twice as strict as it is for suburban backyards. Yet millions of children play in backyards, while abandoned waste sites are subject to expensive cleanups. Lutter and Mader have proposed that instead of spending millions to restore abandoned sites to a pristine state, industry be allowed to satisfy its Superfund obligations by, say, cleaning up all the lead dust in homes and yards near old disposal areas, which would more directly improve people's lives. Under this initiative, they estimate, benefits would exceed costs. But, as current law is worded, such trade-offs can't be considered.

In the end, the cost-benefit case before the Supreme Court is largely about bringing environmental protection into the twenty-first century. When the statutes that govern U.S. environmental protection were first enacted, mainly in the early '70s, there were good reasons to be suspicious of market principles. Economists had spent little time studying pollution and conservation; business was hostile and genuinely believed environmental laws would ruin the economy; the technology for affordable pollution control did not exist.

Today the landscape is transformed. Hundreds of economists have studied how best to achieve ecological safeguards; environmental economics departments exist in many major universities; entire think tanks devote themselves to the task. Business, if not fully enlightened, knows it must operate within environmental guidelines and that a boom economy and declining pollution can go hand in hand. Cheap, effective anti-pollution devices such as the automobile catalytic converter have been invented, and many more are being researched. The world has changed, and it is now safe for cost-benefit thinking. The Supreme Court should recognize that. ■

**Why Republicans can't win without the race card.**

# Fade to Black

*By* JONATHAN COHN

HUNTINGTON, NEW YORK

HERE ARE THE reasons Steve Israel should be way behind in his bid to represent eastern Long Island in Congress. The second district is predominantly working-class; Israel is an affluent small-business owner. The district is mostly Catholic; Israel is Jewish. Most important of all, the district is heavily Republican; Israel is a Democrat.

And not just any Democrat. He's a Democrat running on his party's national platform. A typical Israel mailer, headed "FIGHTING FOR SENIOR CITIZENS," praises newly expanded state assistance for prescription drugs. Then it vows that "the federal government must do even more." Another piece of literature touts Israel's "4-point action plan on education"—which includes signature Democratic programs like President Clinton's $25 billion School Modernization Initiative and Al Gore's proposal for universal preschool. A staunch environmentalist, Israel also favors gun control, abortion rights, and aggressive HMO reform. And, as a fiscal disciplinarian he opposes Republican plans to abolish the estate tax—because, he says, doing away with it completely would require either significant spending cuts or increasing the national debt. "People don't mind paying their fair share—they just don't want to overpay," an energized Israel tells me between campaign appearances in early October. "People's major concerns are that their parents and grandparents live out their lives with health care and that their kids have good schools."

Given that generations of Long Island Republicans won elections on precisely the opposite agenda—slashing taxes and bashing government—statements like that ought to be a political death sentence. But Israel's campaign is alive and well. In a district with 25,000 more Republicans than Democrats, polls show him within striking distance of his Republican opponent, Joan Johnson. What's more, Johnson sounds a little like a Democrat herself. Over the past few months, she has echoed Israel's calls for HMO reform and gun control. She is pro-choice, supports a prescription-drug benefit, and talks about building affordable housing. In this once staunchly Republican district, radio ads tout her as a "maverick" who's "not afraid of standing up against either party." Most conspicuously of all, Johnson is a black woman—running in a district where the Archie Bunker vote once flourished.

What's happening in New York's second district is happen-



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ing in white, middle-class suburbs all over the Northeast and Midwest. In traditionally Republican areas, the Republican themes that worked so well in the 1970s and '80s—cutting taxes, shrinking spending, bashing government—are losing their appeal. Republicans like George W. Bush are adopting a radically different tone, and those who aren't are getting creamed. The reason lies in the campaign issue conspicuous in 2000 for its absence: race. This election has turned into a referendum on what happens to Northern white hostility to government when you de-link it from the racial resentments with which it has been enmeshed for 30 years. The answer is that it collapses. And nowhere can you see that more clearly than here on Long Island.

WORKING-CLASS WHITES BEGAN settling on Long Island during the great suburban boom of the 1940s and '50s. Once they arrived, they set up local political machines modeled on the ones they had known in New York City. In Gotham, the Irish and the Jews were Democrats, while the Italians were Republicans. And, since most of the postwar suburbanites were Italian, the machine that came to dominate Nassau County and later Suffolk County was Republican as well.

It would be hard to overestimate the machine's influence on everyday life. If you were an Italian family man in Levittown or the surrounding communities in, say, 1958, the Republican machine was not just where you got your street cleaned or your school fixed up. It was where you got jobs for yourself and your son, just like in the city. "Where before you called your local pol in Queens or Manhattan," says Jim Chapin, a local historian and longtime political operative, "now you'd call the local Republican guy in Nassau—somebody you knew on the county payroll—and he'd fix your problem." You rewarded that service with political contributions, not to mention your vote. Or else. Legend (never proved) has it that if you were a municipal worker—that is, if you worked for the machine—and you didn't donate to the party, you'd promptly find your house reassessed at a higher value, which meant higher property taxes.

But if the early Long Island Republicans were die-hard partisans, they were not right-wing ideologues. Though perhaps slightly more conservative than the Jews and the Irish, New York's Italians also admired the New Deal, and they harbored no great philosophical antipathy toward government. Why would they? Unlike the wealthy white Protestants who settled Long Island in the early twentieth century—to escape the immigrants who would follow the very same migration path after the war—these working-class Catholics were among government's most faithful clients. When their parents first immigrated to the United States, city patronage machines were the instrument of their Americanization. In the 1930s, they had enthusiastically backed politicians like New York City Mayor Fiorella LaGuardia, a progressive Republican whom FDR considered an ally. And, when they left the city, it was federal intervention, through programs like the G.I. Bill, that made their upward mobility possible. As Kenneth T. Jackson recounts in *Crabgrass Frontier*, for example, veterans could buy homes in Levittown with no down payment or closing costs, thanks to subsidies from the Veterans' Administration and the Federal Housing Administration. Reinforcing this sensibility were the remnants of old-world Catholicism, in which strong central authority enjoyed a place of respect.

Long Island Republicans displayed their support for government in their votes for president. Beginning in 1948, when the first wave of ethnic Catholics inundated Nassau County, Democratic presidential candidates did better with each successive election. The moderate Dwight Eisenhower twice won Nassau by comfortable margins. But in 1960 John Kennedy came within a then-astonishing ten points of Richard Nixon. Four years later, the erosion of support for national Republicans became a full-fledged slide. As Barry Goldwater seized control of the GOP, ousting the Rockefeller wing with which most Long Islanders identified, Lyndon Johnson carried Nassau by 20 points and managed to win Suffolk, too—which made him the first Democrat since Woodrow Wilson to take both counties.

HAD THE NATIONAL political environment remained the same, Long Island might have become one of the country's most reliably *Democratic* bastions. But, of course, the political environment in the '60s wasn't static. It began changing drastically as the issue of race—which had long defined politics in the South—began scrambling politics in New York. As the low-wage manufacturing jobs that had sparked black migration to New York City began drying up, crime and poverty rates soared. The city, under the leadership of infamous "limousine liberal" Mayor John Lindsay, responded by jacking up tax rates and pouring more money into public welfare programs. As Fred Siegel notes in *The Future Once Happened Here*, from 1961 to 1975 the city's real spending grew from $8.6 billion to $21 billion. And since the city was actually losing inhabitants—many of them to Long Island—spending per citizen basically tripled.

In 1974, when the bill for this spending finally came due, New York nearly went bankrupt. And when the New York *Daily News* ran its now-famous headline "FORD TO CITY: DROP DEAD," most people on Long Island seemed to agree. Indeed, fear of, and hostility toward, New York City became the defining characteristics of Long Island politics. Fearful of black migration, the Nassau machine fought efforts to make it increase welfare spending, expand public housing, and combat de facto residential segregation. Nassau Republicans promised to "keep the suburbs suburban" and ward off "Tammany's tentacles"; posters sometimes illustrated those slogans with images of high-rises and blighted Harlem streets. "'Tammany's Tentacles' was really an overt racial message," says Lee Koppelman, executive director of the Long Island Regional Planning Board and a 40-year veteran of local politics. "The message was really a subterfuge for identifying with white flight from New York City."

Indeed, race began turning Long Island's perspective on national politics upside down. Once confident the federal government was their advocate, Long Island whites increasingly saw it as serving the interests only of inner-city blacks. After Johnson's stellar showing in 1964, support in Long



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Island for Democratic presidential candidates began dropping. George Wallace did surprisingly well in 1968, pulling 4.8 percent in Nassau and 8.4 percent in Suffolk. (Of New York's Italian conservatives, Wallace liked to note that they said the same things he did, "except that they had New York accents.") And, even with Wallace siphoning off votes, Nixon carried both counties, a feat that he would repeat four years later—and that every Republican until the Clinton era would reprise. Just as it was philosophically consistent for the typical Long Island voter to split his ticket in the '50s, by the '70s it had become philosophically consistent to vote Republican across the board.

LONG ISLAND'S SHIFT was being replayed in suburbs from Philadelphia to Detroit. And as Northern white ethnics abandoned the national Democratic Party, they joined with whites in the South and the interior West to form what Kevin Phillips in 1969 famously called the "emerging Republican majority." Yet, while that coalition was often called "anti-government," the term concealed deep regional differences. Unlike in the North, where hostility toward the federal government was a relatively recent phenomenon, Southern and Western whites had long seen the federal government as an alien, even invading presence. In the West, this anger was rooted in historical disputes over control of land and natural resources. In the South, it stemmed from struggles against federal power that dated from the Civil War.

Still, the fact that Northern whites viewed government differently from Southern and Western whites didn't make much difference as long as they all perceived government spending as aimed at blacks and the Democratic Party as demanding it spend even more. In effect, race defined ideology—and, in New York, this was never truer than when David Dinkins became mayor in 1990. Dinkins epitomized everything white suburbanites feared about Democrats. After his sluggish responses to the 1990 Korean grocery boycott in Brooklyn and the Crown Heights riots (when his police waited 48 hours to clamp down on a rioting, mostly black mob), white suburban Catholics came to see Dinkins as the latest in a long line of liberals who caved to black militancy while raiding the pocketbooks of whites.

And, when it came to national politics, they saw Democrats as representing the same thing: welfare spending and huge deficits. As Siegel writes, "New York's combination of high taxes and near bankruptcy became Exhibit A in the growing national movement for tax cuts and smaller government." In 1992, Long Island voters ousted Democratic Representative Tom Downey, who had squeaked into office thanks to the 1974 Watergate backlash. Two years later, by more than 100,000 votes, they rejected Mario Cuomo, the living embodiment of unreconstructed New York liberalism, in favor of George Pataki, who promised tax cuts—to be financed by reductions in Medicaid and welfare spending.

But it would be the Republicans' last grand Long Island triumph, because in 1993 David Dinkins lost to Rudy Giuliani, and the city started to look a lot less threatening. Not only did Giuliani put an Italian-American face on the Big Apple, he went to work dismantling much of the big-city liberalism that had alienated white Long Islanders. He remade the welfare system, imposing time limits and forcing recipients to work for their checks. Whereas Dinkins had decriminalized petty offenses, Giuliani embraced the "broken windows" strategy of punishing minor street crimes in an effort to clamp down on crime generally. And crime rates dropped dramatically. As Mitchell Moss, director of New York University's Taub Urban Research Center, sums up, "Giuliani's regime has made it easier for the people on Long Island to see New York as less pathological."

Since Giuliani is a Republican, you might think his success would have helped the GOP on Long Island. It probably would have, had the national Republican Party stood for what he did—and had the national Democratic Party espoused the views of Dinkins. But just as Giuliani was reinventing New York City government, turning it into something suburbanites didn't fear, the two parties were reinventing themselves nationally. After 1994, Clinton abandoned Democratic Party orthodoxies, embracing balanced budgets, a crackdown on crime, and welfare reform. And the Republicans reoriented themselves, too—becoming more nakedly anti-government under Newt Gingrich. For Long Island whites, Giuliani was doing in New York what Clinton was doing nationally: eliminating the causes of their racial resentment. And, as racial concerns subsided, long-dormant tensions within the GOP coalition rose to the surface.

The first fissure appeared over guns, when Carolyn McCarthy ran for Congress as a Democrat in New York's fourth district, in southern Nassau County. In 1993, a deranged gunman had killed McCarthy's husband and gravely injured her son. When McCarthy asked Daniel Frisa, her Republican congressman, to support a ban on assault weapons, he refused. This shouldn't have been a surprise: Not only was the Republican Party close to the National Rifle Association, but the Southerners and Westerners who ran the GOP took the right to bear arms as a matter of faith. But Frisa's stance was a wake-up call for many Long Islanders, who saw gun control as an issue not of rights but of crime. And all of a sudden it was the Republicans—not the Democrats, as they had long believed—who looked soft on crime. In 1996, McCarthy ran for Congress herself on a gun-control platform, and she ousted Frisa 57 percent to 41 percent.

Another issue that drove Long Islanders from the GOP's national leadership was the environment. Protective of their extensive seashore and jolted by some minor calamities that befell the area in the '80s (medical waste washing ashore, toxic spills from the Brookhaven laboratory), Long Islanders had a history of environmental awareness. In the Republican Congress of the mid-'90s, Long Islanders saw a political party that—true to its Southern and Western tradition of minimalist government—was bent on handcuffing, if not eliminating, Washington's environmental watchdogs. The state Republican Party started self-consciously to distance itself from its national leadership. In 1994, Pataki, who boasted an 87.6 rating from the Environmental Planning Lobby in the state assembly, promoted himself as a conservationist in the mold of Theodore Roosevelt. The following year, when congressional Republicans tried to scale back the Clean Water Act and attach deregulatory riders to



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appropriations bills, Long Island Republicans Rick Lazio and Michael Forbes joined some 50 (largely Northern) GOP moderates in dissenting. Conspicuous in standing by the GOP leadership was the soon-to-be-unseated Frisa.

The national GOP's economic policies also began giving Long Island Republicans fits. Like other Empire State Republicans representing "hard hat" districts, third-district congressman Peter King had enjoyed the support of his district's powerful building trades. So he was infuriated by congressional Republicans' refusals to back minimum-wage increases—not to mention their efforts to repeal the pro-labor Davis-Bacon Act, which mandates that federal contractors get prevailing union wages. In a May 1996 interview with the *Daily News*' Lars-Erik Nelson, King lashed out at the GOP's new "hillbilly, backwoods mentality.... We're becoming a rural, Southern, backward party. This is going to backfire, and it's going to kill us."

King wasn't the only one who saw that the Contract With America was pushing Republicans away from their Long Island base: In 1996, New York Senator Al D'Amato—himself a product of the Nassau machine—railed against the "philosophical ayatollahs" turning the GOP into a "party without compassion." Two years later, he still lost to Brooklyn Democrat Charles Schumer, who accused D'Amato of voting "more like a senator from Mississippi than a senator from New York" and ran just six points behind D'Amato on Long Island. The outcome should not have been a surprise: Two years earlier, Long Islanders had voted overwhelmingly for Clinton, whose margins there rivaled LBJ's in 1964. Their top issues, according to a *Newsday* poll? Not tax cuts or government waste, but health care and Medicare.

None of the issues dividing Long Island Republicans from their national leadership seems to involve race. But that's exactly the point. For three decades, race framed almost every debate over government power. To the white working- and middle-class voters of Long Island, any issue regarding government—be it government fighting crime, regulating the environment, or pumping money into health care—became a debate about "welfare," out-of-control federal spending, and federal indulgence of black militancy, which meant it was implicitly about taxing middle-class suburbanites to subsidize inner-city blacks. In such an atmosphere, Republicans could almost always claim that by shrinking government they were shifting resources back to the middle class. And they could almost always win. Yet, once Democrats embraced balanced budgets and welfare reform, this formula lost its potency. There was not much in government left to prune except programs like Medicare, education funding, and environmental protection—programs that benefited the middle-class whites of Long Island.

This doesn't mean factors besides race haven't also contributed to the troubles of the Long Island GOP. For one thing, Long Island, like the rest of America, is aging, which helps the party associated with government programs for the elderly. At the same time, Long Island is getting an infusion of younger workers—some from this country, many from abroad—who didn't experience the anti-Democrat sentiment of the '70s and '80s. The fact that the Nassau Republican machine ran the county into near bankruptcy has also damaged Republican claims to be the party of efficient and sound economic management. And, of course, Long Island itself has a growing minority population.

Still, these Long Island-specific factors don't explain the fact that Republicans are losing ground in suburbs throughout the Northeast and much of the Midwest. Look at Macomb County, Michigan, the quintessential Reagan Democrat suburb, which backed Clinton in 1996. Or the recent track record of Arthur Finkelstein, the mastermind of D'Amato's first campaign, who became synonymous with vitriolic—and, many would say, racially coded—attacks on liberalism that elected Republican after Republican in the '80s. In 1996, GOP clients tried the Finkelstein strategy on Democratic Senate candidates Robert Torricelli in New Jersey, Paul Wellstone in Minnesota, and Jack Reed in Rhode Island. All three Democrats won with strong white ethnic support. After D'Amato lost two years later, Finkelstein himself started spreading the word that Republicans must co-opt some traditionally Democratic issues to survive, because the old attacks on liberalism no longer won over white suburbanites.

One person who has certainly learned that lesson is George W. Bush. While criticizing Al Gore for supporting "big government," Bush has gone to great lengths to showcase his own support for greater spending on popular government programs. And, whatever one says about his gubernatorial record on racially tinged issues like the death penalty and his Bob Jones University visit during the Republican primary, he has tried in the general election to steer clear of racially coded appeals. In the final debate, he even stretched the truth to portray himself as a supporter of affirmative action and toughened hate-crime laws, which he is not. At the Philadelphia convention, he surrounded himself with every black Republican his campaign could muster.

Is Bush's inclusive rhetoric and imagery a sincere attempt to win black votes? Probably not. Most observers think it's a roundabout way to appeal to moderate whites, especially women. But that's exactly the point. From Goldwater through President Bush, the GOP appealed to middle-of-the-road white voters with precisely the opposite message. The fact that Republicans now court them by embracing diversity is a sure sign that the old tactics don't work anymore.

Which brings us back, finally, to Joan Johnson's campaign against Steve Israel in New York's second district. Johnson was not the early favorite to succeed Lazio as the district's Republican standard-bearer. When the presumptive frontrunner said he wasn't interested in running, local Republican operatives bandied about a list of several contenders—on which Johnson was not initially very high. (Indeed, in some tellings, she was at the very bottom.) But she was a popular local official. And, more important, the Republicans needed a "very moderate" candidate, according to Tony Apollaro, the county Republican chairman. Apollaro insists that in the two and a half hours the local Republican committee spent discussing her candidacy, the fact that Johnson is black never came up. That's hard to believe. But Apollaro wants you to believe it, and that alone speaks volumes about how politics has changed, in Long Island and beyond. ■



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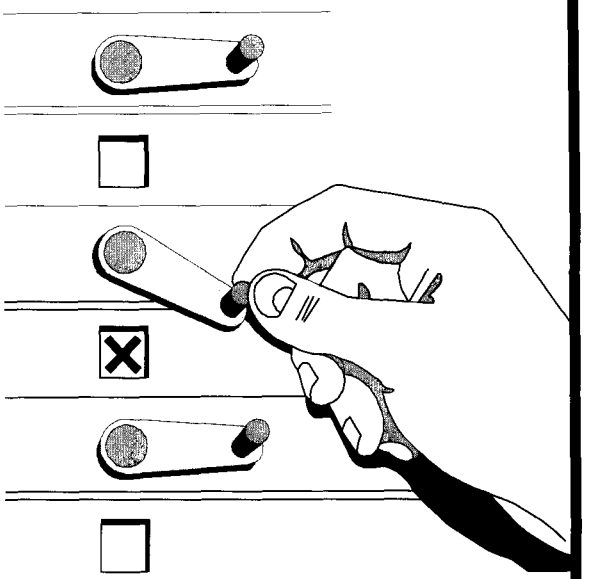

## *Suffrage, the bedrock of the Constitution, is being eroded in the name of the War on Drugs.*

- *There are nearly four million persons currently or permanently disenfranchised as a result of laws that take away the voting rights of felons and ex-felons.*
- *No other democracy besides the U.S. disenfranchises convicted offenders for life. Many democratic nations, including Denmark, France, Israel, and Poland, permit prisoners to vote as well.*
- *Nearly three-quarters (73 percent) of the disenfranchised are not in prison but are on probation, on parole or have completed their sentences.*
- *1.4 million African American men -- 13 percent of the adult African American male population -- have lost the right to vote, a rate of disenfranchisement that is seven times the national average. By comparison, in the 1996 general election 4.6 million African American men voted.*
- *In Florida one in three African American men has permanently lost the right to vote.*
- *In five states Iowa, Mississippi, New Mexico, Virginia, and Wyoming one in four black men (24% to 28%) have permanently lost the right to vote.*

## Can we expect people to be responsible citizens if they are treated as second class citizens?

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***Sources:*** Fellner, Jamie and Mauer, Marc, "Losing the Vote: The Impact of Felony Disenfranchisement Laws in the United States (Washington, DC: Human Rights Watch & The Sentencing Project, 1998).

Mauer, Marc and Allard, Patricia, "Regaining the Vote: An Assessment of Activity Relating to Felon Disenfranchisement Laws" (Washington, DC: Sentencing Project, January 2000), from the web at http://www.sentencingproject.org/news/regainvote.htm, last accessed Sept. 27, 2000.

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# Stanley Kauffmann on Films

## Journeying

AUGUST WILSON'S **Boesman and Lena** is, by now, a great play. At least a generation must pass, I'd say, before one can use the word "great" about a new work without the taint of film-and-theater gabble. I saw this play in its first American production, Off-Broadway, in 1970—three times—saw it the following year in London, and in recent years have (as the phrase goes) taught it. *Boesman and Lena* easily weathers tests of time, of varied inquiry, of changes in self and society, and, more than surviving these tests, grows through them. One immense social and political change confirms this. Boesman and Lena are a South African colored couple in the days of apartheid, but the disappearance of apartheid does not date the play. It transcends topicality to underscore what has always been true of it; it is no more restrictively about a South African colored couple than Hamlet is restrictively about a Danish prince. The characters are, to one extent or another, ourselves.

In 1974, this three-character play was filmed, most unfortunately, with two white people, the author and Yvonne Braceland, in the title roles. They are gifted actors and, in fact, they had played Boesman and Lena in the play's premiere at a South African university in 1969. But that casting was necessary because of legal restrictions at the time; in the film the brown-faced white actors were unacceptable. Now the play has been filmed again (released by Kino International). It was shot in South Africa with two American black actors in the roles, Danny Glover and Angela Bassett; and it was directed by John Berry, also American, who directed the Off-Broadway production in 1970. Now Fugard's play has—almost—the screen embodiment that it deserves.

The story is so simple that it is risky to tell it. Here is the summary in *Truths the Hands Can Touch*, Russell Vandenbroucke's book on Fugard:

> Two colored itinerants arrive on the bank of the Swartkops River. ["Coloreds" are black people with white blood, distinct from kaffirs who are pure African.] They have walked many hours since their eviction that morning from their shanty. Such treks have marked the times and places of their relationship, yet Lena is uncertain about her identity and her past, which concerns her more than her future. She repeatedly presses Boesman with questions, but he replies with derision rather than answers. As they prepare for the night, an old black man wanders into the campsite and is adopted by Lena, who communes with him intimately through the night until his death. As Boesman prepares to flee, afraid that he will be suspected of murder, Lena declares her independence from him, then chooses to join him on yet another trek.

Through the fading of day and the coming of night, these two people, who carry the junk that is all they own, use it to build a small shelter for the night, quarrel, remember much—their trudging of the roads, their child who died, the babies who were stillborn. Boesman is powerful, angry, and has often beaten Lena; she is the more fragile yet the stronger. At this point in their pointless lives, they make some effort—Lena particularly—to determine who they are, how they will go on. Remembering how their shanty was bulldozed that morning by white men, Lena says:

> It was too early in the morning to have your life kicked in again. Sitting there in the dust with pieces . . . bare assed! That's what it felt like! . . . and thinking of somewhere else again. Put your life on your head and walk, sister. Another day gone. Other people lived it. We tramped it into the ground. I haven't got so many left, Boesman.

Besides the fact that they both speak with South African accents, Fugard's writing in itself has un-English lilts. He has said that he conceived the dialogue in Afrikaans, which these people would speak in reality, then translated in his mind as he wrote.

A ragged old black man wanders in out of the vastness, and Boesman, who has called himself the white man's rubbish, addresses the old man with the word "kaffir" (or "nigger"). Thus, to the human spectrum already aligned here, another tint is added: hunger for superiority, particularly in those who have been abused by others.

The old man speaks Xhosa, which they don't understand, and, exhausted, he doesn't utter much of that. Boesman wants him to go, but, as night falls, Lena huddles with the stranger at their fire while Boesman, bribed with the bottle of wine that would have been Lena's, accepts the old man's presence and goes into their shanty. When he comes out about an hour later, the old man, still huddled under a blanket with Lena, is dead. Boesman, apparently sensing that the old man's wanderings were a parallel to their own lives, his inability to communicate was a signet of their isolation, his death a prediction of theirs, is infuriated and beats the body, senselessly, almost in fear.

But he and Lena must leave now, quickly, to avoid trouble. They gather up their junk, and onward they trek. Onward. To quote my review in these pages (July 25, 1970): "The play's epic quality derives from the wide and simple arch of its compass: shelter, food, fire, children, quarrels, ego needs, endless pilgrimage."

The cast is fine. By coincidence I first saw Danny Glover in a later Fugard play, *"Master Harold"...and the Boys*, at the Yale Repertory Theater in 1982, the performance that brought him attention and success. As Boesman, Glover is fierce and cowardly, desperate and gloating, bitter and defeated and persistent. We soon sense that he depends for his masculinity on Lena, not because he can beat her to prove his strength but because it is her inner strength, which is almost a desperation, that really sustains him. Glover's dynamics could have used some shading: he is sometimes a bit too loud for too long (which was not true of James Earl Jones in Berry's New York production). Otherwise Glover's Boesman is this man and the idea of this man.

Angela Bassett, as Lena, is superb. No woman is ever likely to equal the Lena of Ruby Dee in that New York production: Dee's performance was one of the treasures of a lifetime's theatergoing. But Bassett comes close. Her accent (which is the easiest aspect for an acting talent) sounds perfect; her voice has the exotic music; her body has the angles and slouches and summonings that Lena's life has worn into it. Her intensity, her gentleness with the old man, her need to expend this gentleness, give us Lena.



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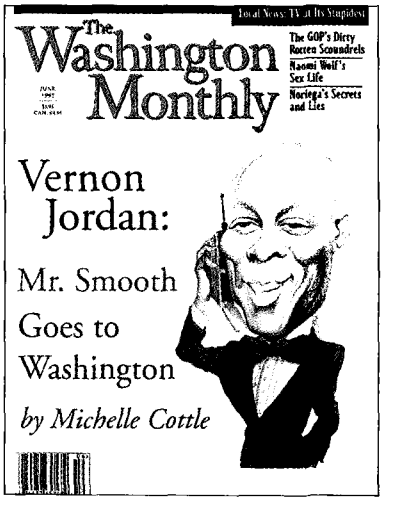


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Willie Jonah is the old man, and he shows, as was true sometimes in the past, that the right actor, the actor who can carry a whole life within him silently, can make this almost tacit role eloquent.

*Boesman and Lena* was the last work in John Berry's long film and theater career, much of which took place in Europe because he was a McCarthyite exile. He died in November 1999, just as the post-production work on this film was finishing. He had made the screen adaptation of the play, with—in general—the love and understanding that he brought to his 1970 production, weighed here with his screen experience. His adaptation introduces flashback scenes of the couple's distant and recent past. These flashes are quick bumps in the work's "present" continuity, but they are their own reason for existence. Berry was not aiming at the usual fracture of a play for visual variety, his purpose clearly was to support his actors. In the theater the actors of Boesman and Lena must themselves recreate their past. Berry evidently thought that, if he had to condense the play somewhat for film purposes (which he did), he could, in a sort of compensation, use film techniques to aid his actors. He managed these flashbacks so adroitly that they do indeed support and fulfill rather than distract.

My one firm objection to this adaptation is not about those flashbacks, it is about the ending—for two reasons. First, Berry has Boesman and Lena walk away down the road hand in hand, which suggests that their troubles are resolved. They are not. If the film had ended the way it began, with Boesman trudging ahead of Lena, their lives would not seem uplifted. Lena herself contradicts this warm suggestion; she says as they go: "I'm alive, Boesman, there's daylights left in me.... Next time you want to kill me, do it. When you hit, hit those lights out."

Further, her very last words in the play are "But not so fast. It's dark." The last stage direction: "They look around for the last time, then turn and walk off into the darkness." Twice, then, Fugard asks for darkness into which they tramp at the close. Berry adjusts the dialogue and changes the time of day to morning. Thus Boesman and Lena take on a touch of a newly resolved couple walking into the dawn of a new life, which was not Fugard's intent.

On the whole, however, the play is well-flexed for the screen. And the film is crowned with a paradox. Its cinematic being is enhanced by its original theater conception. Even with the insertions cited above, even in this other form, the picture rests on the basic image of the play as play—bare, classic, elemental. Two people arrive at a place, rest, confront their existence, then continue. Life flows, eddies for a moment, then flows on. It is a masterpiece. ■

# Robert Brustein on Theater

## Or in the Heart or in the Head

**Proof**, WHICH RECENTLY re-opened at the Walter Kerr Theatre after a run at the Manhattan Theatre Club, is the latest in a string of plays with one-word titles that represent the theater's belated tribute to the conceptual mind. Tom Stoppard probably started the whole fashion with *Arcadia*, a period comedy that features, among other things, dialogues on English gardening and Newtonian physics. But the trend has exploded in the last few years to include Yasmina Reza's *Art*, an argument provoked by a post-modern painting, Margaret Edson's *Wit*, an infirmity play surrounded by a frame of metaphysical poetry, and Michael Frayn's *Copenhagen*, a scientific discourse on the subject of quantum theory, indeterminacy, and atomic fission. These are the major examples of a genre with terse titles and prolix personae that has now managed to occupy the middle (or the middlebrow) ground of the Western stage.

I am still trying to figure out why this development leaves me somewhat less ecstatic than it does my critical colleagues. Obviously we should encourage anything that raises the intellectual level of our benighted theater; and it is also true that some of these plays (notably *Wit*) have a lot more going for them than mental pyrotechnics. Yet the danger of this kind of Cliffs Notes approach to playwriting is that the dramatist, simply by dropping names or equations, will feel relieved of the obligation to investigate the emotional and spiritual aspects of the material, and the spectator will leave the theater feeling a lot more intelligent than he actually is. "Tell me where is fancy bred," Shakespeare wrote, "Or in the heart or in the head." There is no doubt that this playwright, at least, located the seat of the imagination (which he called "fancy") in the non-cerebral parts of the human body.

*Proof* is David Auburn's first major production; and if it is not exactly the brilliant debut that some have been claiming, it certainly represents the work of a writer with a fairly decent grasp on his not terribly fanciful material. The "proof" of the title is a breakthrough mathematical equation regarding prime numbers, the authorship of which is a subject of dispute. Catherine (Mary-Louise Parker) is the daughter of an intermittently psychotic and recently deceased professor at the University of Chicago (Larry Bryggman), whose ghost comes to visit her from time to time. She has a fling with one of her father's graduate students (Ben Shenkman) after she finds him rifling through her father's notebooks. She is in conflict with her rather unimaginative sister (Johanna Day), who has come to sell the family house and move Catherine to New York. And when this relatively under-educated woman claims to be the author of the theorem in question (I am ruining what is intended to be a stunning first act revelation), there is some debate as to whether she is really treading in her father's demented footsteps.

We never learn the actual nature of the discovery, or why it constitutes such a great contribution to human knowledge. By his own admission, Auburn does not know or care much about mathematical theory. But what makes this play problematic is not its author's ignorance regarding prime numbers. It is the thinness of his plot. He runs out of material so quickly that, by the middle of the second act, the play jerks to a halt and starts running in place. *Proof* sometimes looks like a rather austere stage version of *Good Will Hunting*, insofar as it features a whiz kid central character who is also an *idiot savant*. But if *Good Will Hunting* was concerned with questions of class, *Proof* focuses on questions of gender—how "Shakespeare's sister" could have written all his plays if she hadn't been forced to



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shine unappreciated on the ocean floor, and so on.

David Auburn's writing may not be terribly electric or dynamic. But Daniel Sullivan's direction muffs the few opportunities that the playwright offers to hoist the action out of the quotidian. With its spectral visitations from the heroine's father and its nonlinear treatment of time, *Proof* is, after all, something of a ghost story. But the production remains mired in domesticity. It is relentlessly realistic, with John Lee Beatty contributing another in his gallery of Edward Hopper brick structures, and Neil A. Mazzela's lighting failing to distinguish between the gritty present and the ethereal past.

Where the evening does prosper is in the acting, especially in Mary-Louise Parker's Catherine. I first saw this fine actress in 1988 playing Emily to Eric Stolz's George in the Lincoln Center production of *Our Town*. Young as she was at the time, she made it instantly clear that she was born for the stage, a promise that she confirmed nine years later playing L'il Bit in *How I Learned to Drive*. Here she turns the twenty-eight-year-old Catherine into a restless, angry ragdoll of a woman with a frazzled slouch, who manages to accomplish one of the speediest costume changes in recorded history. (She goes up a whole flight of stairs, then appears seconds later on stage in a completely new set of rumpled clothes.) That she can also create such texture out of her underwritten role is an even more impressive feat of stage magic.

## Picture Window

The handsome fellow, visiting us in
The mountains stood at the picture-window
"Giving on"—as they used to say—a view
Of three bright sister-peaks we call Patty
Peggy and Polly; seen from behind, he
Composed one of those images they call—
The Germans—*Rückfiguren*, his back, backed
By the facing prospect, facing us while
The ever-changing end-of-the-day light
Wrought continual wonders on the hills
Shedding cloaks of shadow over parts of
The valley visible from where he stood,
Gazing at what I realized—as he touched
His chin briefly the better to inspect
Something about it—was merely his own
Image he was admiring. That was all
He could see in the window, not the world
As it yielded up alms in one of its
All too infrequent moments of beauty,
Simple and non-contingent. Too bad, that
In a glass lightly, face to mirrored face,
He could only toy in the worst way with
That splendid modern instrument of truth:
Plate-glass, which superimposes mirrored
Patches of gazer's face, and bits of the
Space out of which he looks, upon all that
He might be seeing, something of subject
Seen as inescapable from all sight
Of the object of its regard. Better
That we see through ourselves, through our very
Seeing itself as if "through the eye and
Not with it"—as better to live with (save
In opacities of talk about them)
The indivisibility of our
Transparency of body and the mind's
Complicating, fragile reflectiveness.

**John Hollander**

Anne Bogart's **War of the Worlds**, a production that played briefly at the Brooklyn Academy of Music after its premiere at the Humana Festival in Louisville, is an effort to do to Orson Welles what Orson Welles did to William Randolph Hearst—namely, to expose his character weaknesses through a semi-fictional action. In a program note, Bogart writes that she was astonished to find Welles such an object of respect in Europe when he is remembered in America "as a fat man on talk shows who also appeared in advertisements for wine." Actually, he has remained a figure of considerable interest, if not always of veneration, in our own country, and not just among theater and film connoisseurs. It is true that people love to take pot shots at him. Pauline Kael famously questioned his authorship of *Citizen Kane*; Simon Callow in a recent biography exposed his arrogant treatment of actors; and Tim Robbins made him the crudely egotistical center of *Cradle Will Rock*. "Sometimes I goe about and poyson wells," sneered Barabas in Marlowe's *Jew of Malta*. He didn't know he was initiating what would later become a cottage industry.

But Welles has been a subject of considerable admiration, too. Some Hollywood directors, notably Peter Bogdanovich, have worshipped the man just this side of idolatry. (When not writing biographies and critical studies of Welles, he was usually impersonating his directorial style.) Bogart offers much the same tribute of imitation on stage. *War of the Worlds* is a biography of Welles dressed in the clothes of *Citizen Kane*, using the same situations, dialogue, characters, and structure—on the implied assumption that Welles was the secret hero of his own film. "What you are about to hear is the real story, absolutely true, based on solid fact," argues the actor playing Welles (Stephen Webber), in the act of impersonating his incessant cigar-smoking, his footloose ungainliness, his sly insinuating smile.

The idea must have seemed irresistible in theory. In actuality, while Bogart's stage craft is always ingenious, it sometimes seems like an effort to beef up the recalcitrant writing of Naomi Iizuka. While it is pleasant to hear reprises of some of your favorite movies and radio plays, and engaging to watch evocations of Joseph Cotton, Everett Sloane, Agnes Moorhead, and the rest of Welles's repertory company, the novelty quickly palls and one soon begins longing for the originals. There are too many glib postmortem judgments on Welles ("He was a great man, but in the end he destroyed himself"), too many easy comments on his deadly sins of sloth, gluttony, vanity and pride. Finally, *The War of the Worlds* comes unwittingly to embody one of its principal themes: that we live off the corpses of the cultural heroes whom we help destroy.

**The Syringa Tree** (Playhouse 91) has very little in the way of stage effects outside of a swing and a cyclorama. It is a solo performance, written and acted by Pamela Gien, part fiction, mostly fact, about her childhood in South Africa during apartheid. It is also, let me quickly add, uncommonly moving, even wrenching. Gien was once an actress in my own company, but nothing in her previous work prepared me for what she is delivering here—a series of character transformations so instantaneous and so intense that you believe the stage is peopled with multitudes. Still, it is not just the technical achievement that startles one into attention. It is the way she manages to delineate, physically and vocally, a whole world of whites, blacks, coloreds, Jews, and Afrikaners—a world of divided identities where the very fact that a black baby has been born without "papers" can destroy her and uproot everyone around her.

The various incidents of the play are seen through the eyes of a half-Jewish child in Johannesburg; and if the evening



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has a weakness, it is that the voice that Gien has chosen for little Elizabeth tends to grate on your nerves. But she has perfect pitch in the way she characterizes the harassed father, dispensing precious medicines, the slightly hysterical mother, the Faulknerian maid and her hapless little "pickaninny," the hard-nosed Afrikaners praying for rain, all as a prelude to the terrible events of Soweto. The grown-up Elizabeth leaves for America as a result, and her subsequent return to Johannesburg to find her past again constitutes a poem of inconsolable loss and nostalgia that leaves the American audience grieving for the beloved country as much as the central character. My friendship with Gien should prevent me from reviewing her work at length or getting too enthusiastic about it in print. So forgive me, but this really is a transcendent dramatic experience.

Bill Irwin also has a one-person show this season—an enactment of Samuel Beckett's **Texts for Nothing** at the Classic Stage Company. Irwin has done extraordinary things in his career, but few as remarkable as persuading the notoriously recalcitrant Beckett estate to let him put four of these thirteen prose pieces onto the stage. As a result of his persuasive powers, and his own meticulous stage work, he has managed to create a new Beckett play, or at least a new Beckett performance piece, that could very well find a permanent place in the theatrical canon.

Irwin maintains that *Texts for Nothing*, written a year and a half after *Waiting for Godot*, is actually a companion piece, and he is undoubtedly right. The prose texts deal with the same refusal to persist coupled with the powerful need to persist—the futility of continuing colliding with the necessity of continuing—that underlies the trials of Didi and Gogo. Under Irwin's direction, Doug Stein has imagined a terrain that looks like a particularly bleak part of the Rockies—steep escarpments stocked with mud holes, boulders, and one small tuft of green on the mountain, representing (like the second act leaf in *Godot*) a trace of hope for renewal in an otherwise barren landscape.

When we first see Irwin, he is sliding helplessly down this mountain on a stream of dirt and pebbles. He is an exile from paradise, and he will spend the rest of the evening trying to scale the heights again. Accoutered in a bowler hat, baggy pants, a collarless shirt, and a tight-fitting jacket, he looks for all the world like Chaplin in *The Adventurer*—but unlike the ingenious Charlie, this is a clown that has lost all his resources. "Suddenly, at long last, I couldn't any more, I couldn't go on. Someone said, 'You can't stay here. Can't stay and can't go." (Or as Beckett puts it better in Godot, "Well, shall we go?" Yes, let's go." *They do not move.*)

Irwin physicalizes this dilemma with his rubbery features and elastic limbs, bungling into mud holes, tripping over stones, wriggling down slopes. At one point he walks over what looks like solid ground, only to be plunged into a cavernous cavity ("I'm in the hole the century dug"). Nancy Schertier's lighting brightens and darkens, marking an unbroken sequence of endless nights. "It's always night," Irwin observes, "why is that?" And he quickly answers, "To give the best to look forward to." In this continuing conversation with an absent God, where language is less a path to salvation than a means of survival, life itself becomes a purgatorial punishment. By the end, like Winnie in *Happy Days*, Irwin is up to his neck in his hole, continuing to babble until eternity comes.

Bill Irwin has contributed wonderful performances in the past, including a memorable Lucky in the Mike Nichols production of *Waiting for Godot*. And he does wonderful things here. Owing to his rather flat American vocal resources, however, Irwin cannot produce the reverberant music of such great Beckett actors as Barry McGovern, Jack McGowran, and Patrick Magee. As a result, the evening sometimes seems considerably longer than its eighty minutes, and at times the audience gets ahead of the material. But what Irwin fails to verbalize he certainly manages to physicalize and theatricalize—making up as a mime, dancer, and clown whatever he might lack as an actor. *Texts for Nothing* may not be the greatest Beckett work in the repertory, but still it belongs there. It demonstrates anew where fancy is truly bred, while Irwin's epic struggle with that intractable mountain etches itself indelibly on our hearts and minds. ■

# Give All

*By* JAMES WOOD

## Bellow: A Biography by James Atlas

(Random House, 686 pp., $35)

I.

EVERYONE IS CALLED a "beautiful writer" at some point or other, just as all flowers are eventually called pretty. Any prose above the most ordinary, anything above sea-level, makes people dizzy with adulation. "Stylists" are crowned every day, of steadily littler kingdoms. But of course there are very few really fine writers of prose. Those regarded as peacocks of rich writing often turn out to be ambitious sentimentalists (Norman Mailer, Cormac McCarthy), while the lacy loiterers praised for their "elegance" (Gore Vidal, William Gass) are rather substanceless, and those cherished for their calm emaciations, who are thought of as athletes of reduction (Robert Stone, Brian Moore), are just leathery regulars.

This is not surprising, since a prose is a vision, a totality. Great stylists should be as rare as great writers. Saul Bellow is probably the greatest writer of American prose of the twentieth century—where greatest means most abundant, various, precise, rich, lyrical. This seems a relatively uncontroversial claim. The august raciness, the Melvillean enormities and cascades ("the limp silk fresh lilac drowning water"), the Joycean wit and metaphoricity, the lancing similes with their sharp American nibs ("he was meteor-bearded like John Brown"), the happy rolling freedom of the daring uninsured sentences, the prose absolutely ripe with inheritance, bursting with the memories of Shakespeare and Lawrence yet prepared for modern emergencies, the Argus-eye for detail, and controlling all this, the firm metaphysical intelligence—all this is now thought of as Bellow's, as "Bellovian." It is the prose Coleridge described as having "the hooks-and-eyes of memory."

Reading Bellow is a special way of being alive; his prose is germinal. Earlier this year, the reader might have come across an image in *Ravelstein* in which the narrator describes how his neurologist, Dr. Bax, coaxed his very ill patient back from death to life: "Dr. Bax, like a skillful Indian scout of the last century, pressed his ear to the rail and heard the locomotive coming. Life would soon be back, and I would occupy my seat in the life-train. Death would shrink to its former place at the margin of the landscape." This lovely metaphor,



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celebrating life, also enacts it; the prose *is* the life-train.

Again and again, Bellow's writing reaches for life, for the human gust. Joyce is his only obvious twentieth-century rival. Indeed, sometimes they are eerily close. In *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Joyce alights for a moment on Mr. Casey, whose fingers could not be straightened out. "And Mr Casey told him that he had got those three cramped fingers making a birthday present for Queen Victoria." In *Humboldt's Gift*, we come across the Russian Bath in Chicago: "On the second floor there had always lived aged workingstiffs, lone Ukrainian grandfathers, retired carline employees, a pastry cook famous for his icings who had to quit because his hands became arthritic." It is a curious historical reversal, that Joyce can sometimes sound like Bellow, or that nothing sounds more like Bellow than Lawrence's description of the Rhine, from his short story, "The Border Line": "old Father Rhine, flowing in greenish volume."

This life-sown prose moves fast, logging impressions with broken speed. Rereading *Herzog*, one encounters too many marvels to record. There is Herzog's mistress Ramona, sparkily described as "certainly not one of those little noli me tangerines." And there is a brief memory of Strawforth, a fat schoolboy, with his "fat curling thumbs," and a rabbi, "short-bearded, his nose violently pitted with black." And Nachman, who played the harmonica in the lavatory stalls: "You heard the saliva in the cells of the tin instrument as he sucked and blew." And the light bulb that Herzog remembers at home, "which had a spike at the end like a German helmet. The large loose twist of tungsten filament blazed." Herzog recalls his asthmatic brother Willie in the grip of a breathing fit: "Trying to breathe he gripped the table and rose on his toes like a cock about to crow."

There is Valentine Gersbach and his wooden leg, "bending and straightening gracefully like a gondolier." There is the hospital that Herzog remembers being in as a child, where the icicles hung from the hospital roof "like the teeth of fish, clear drops burning at their tips," and the Christian lady who comes to the young Herzog to read from the Bible, her hatpin sticking out from the back of her head "like a trolley rod." Passing a fish-shop, Herzog pauses to look at the catch: "The fish were packed together, backs arched as if they were swimming in the crushed, smoking ice, bloody bronze, slimy black-green, gray-gold—the lobsters were crowded to the glass, feelers bent." In New York, Herzog passes a demolition crew, and this passage flows out, one of the great examples of urban realism, at once lyrical and robustly particular:

> At the corner he paused to watch the work of the wrecking crew. The great metal ball swung at the walls, passed easily through brick, and entered the rooms, the lazy weight browsing on kitchens and parlors. Everything it touched wavered and burst, spilled down. There rose a white tranquil cloud of plaster dust. The afternoon was ending, and in the widening area of demolition was a fire, fed by the wreckage. Moses heard the air, softly pulled toward the flames, felt the heat. The workmen, heaping the bonfire with wood, threw strips of molding like javelins. Paint and varnish smoked like incense. The old flooring burned gratefully—the funeral of exhausted objects. Scaffolds walled with pink, white, green doors quivered as the six-wheeled trucks carried off fallen brick. The sun, now leaving for New Jersey and the west, was surrounded by a dazzling broth of atmospheric gases.

COURTESY RANDOM HOUSE

Saul Bellow, Aspen, Colorado, c. 1969

Given so much, it might be easy for a reader to become blasé. Good writers tends to raise one up like canal-locks, so that one swims at their level, and forgets the medium that supports one. After a while the reader might take for granted Bellow's exuberance of detail, and might not notice that the squares of the harmonica are called "cells," that the tungsten filament in the bulb is seen not only as large but also wonderfully as "loose," that the icicles have clear drops "burning at their tips" (the paradox of heat at the end of something cold, yet superbly right as a description of ice melting into water), that the demolition ball, hard at work, is yet seen as "lazy" and "browsing"—and not "browsing in" but "browsing on" those kitchens and parlors. (Bellow adds strange prepositions to his verbs, as Lawrence does when he has a woman walking behind her lover "gloating on him from behind," or: "Banford turtled up like a fighting cock.")

One realizes, with a shock, that Bellow has taught one how to see and how to hear, has opened the senses. Until this moment one had not really thought of the looseness of a lightbulb filament, one had not heard the saliva bubbling in the harmonica, one had not seen well enough the nose pitted with black pores, and the demolition ball's slow, heavy selection of its victims. A dozen good writers—Updike, DeLillo, others—can render you the window of a fish shop, and do it very well; but it is Bellow's genius to see the lobsters "crowded to the glass" and their "feelers bent" by that glass—to see the riot of life in the dead peace of things.

Flaubert told Maupassant that "talent is a slow patience," and that "there is a part of everything which is unexplored, because we are accustomed to using our eyes only in association with the memory of what people before us have thought of the thing we are looking at. Even the smallest thing has something in it which is



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unknown. We must find it." Bellow is Flaubertian in this sense: either he makes us seize, by force of metaphorical wit, new connections and linkages—"the toes of his bare feet were pressed together like Smyrna figs"; cats with "grenadier tails"; a man's "dry-cereal mustache"—or he notices what is unexplored: "Her throat was ever so slightly ringed or rippled by some enriching feminine deposit."

THIS NEEDS TO be said because James Atlas, in his large biography, tends to neglect such qualities. He writes of Bellow as if he were writing a life of Joyce Carol Oates or Richard Ford, some middler who oddly managed to bag the Nobel Prize. It is strange, after all, to write of Bellow's first novel, *Dangling Man*, which appeared in 1944, that it was "almost defiantly literary—again, a Bellow trademark." (Imagine this said of Flaubert or Joyce or Mann.) It is peculiar to analyze *Herzog* so biographically that the novel seems nothing more than a bitter account of a cuckolding, and then to add, as an apparent concession, that it is the writer's most "*written* book: His always keen eye missed nothing." Again, think how inadequate this sentence would be if applied to Flaubert or Proust or Joyce. Those writers, like Bellow, do not simply miss nothing; they make seeing a metaphysics, a life-project—a slow patience.

But the suspicion grows, as one reads this disappointing book, that Atlas does not want Bellow to be too literary, or too intellectual, or too political—or too himself. Atlas seems to want to imprison Bellow in Atlas's own qualifications, to keep him penned in his petty biographical yard. Thus Atlas seems to decide that Bellow, coming from Jewish Chicago, had a kind of respect for Great Books and Big Ideas that now seems a little foolish, a bit overdone. Books, as Atlas sees it, were just Bellow's ticket, the way out of Chicago for Bellow's generation and for a whole generation of American Jewish intellectuals. The tone in which Atlas discusses this veneration appears to hide a condescension, as if Atlas wished that these guys could just get over all those Great Books, all that high and serious stuff.

"Bellow was just as much of a culture snob as any of the contributors to *Partisan Review*," Atlas observes. "His novels are crammed with references to writers and philosophers whose gravity of thought he found intoxicating but with whom he had only a glancing familiarity—to Kant and Goethe, to Nietzsche and Max Weber and the duc de Saint-Simon. Referring to the best that has been thought and said was a literary tic." This has the tone of a *Vanity Fair* profile. A culture snob! A little later, while discussing the "defiantly literary" *Dangling Man* (defiant to whom?), Atlas writes: "It was as if Bellow needed to make the point that even a writer from Chicago read books." Twenty pages later: "Bellow was never entirely sure when he ventured into the realm of ideas; he tended to cloak his true concerns in a stilted, metaphorical language that put distance between his subject and himself." Ten pages later: "Philosophy, then and later, was one of the unfortunate legacies of Bellow's immersion in the University of Chicago Great Books culture. His heroes shared a penchant for belaboring ideas. They were the products of a provincial Chicago boy's effort to show that he wasn't provincial, that he was at home with the whole of Western thought."

"Unfortunate" to whom? Not to most of Bellow's readers. A hundred pages later we get this *ex cathedra* summation: "Bellow was not a complex thinker. He had laboriously worked his way through the classics when 'boning up' on the 101 Great Ideas for Mortimer Adler's *Syntopicon*; he was conversant, in a literary way, with Plato and Aristotle, Kierkergaard and Nietzsche. They were part of his 'intellectual' credentials—his passport from the book-adoring culture of the Jewish ghetto to the New World." But why his passport *from* this world? Surely these books, these references and allusions, constituted the very "book-adoring" world itself? And when did Bellow, his novels soaked in the memory of childhood, ever leave that culture? Atlas's crudities in these passages are unfathomable. They have the sound of the profile writer quickly frying his subject on the biographical griddle, sunny side up. Why bother with anything as nubbly as an idea if it can be consigned to a personal need, a psychology, a "tic"?

First of all, what is Atlas alleging? That Bellow has not read *Fear and Trembling* and *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and Proust and Weber ("glancing familiarity," "conversant, in a literary way")? Or that, having read them, he did not understand them? Or—the likeliest version—that he should not have been reading them at all? Moreover, the charge is incoherent even within the terms of Atlas's biography, since he often concedes the force of Bellow's intellect. He knows well that Bellow—unlike, say, Mailer—has a powerful, disciplined, and educated mind, that he can read Proust and Rousseau in the original if he wishes, that he spent many years of his life teaching literature to intelligent graduate students at Chicago. Atlas quotes one critic, who described Bellow as "the outstanding 'theoretician' among the major novelists of our time," and elsewhere he admits to his "range as a social critic, his wide knowledge of Western culture, and, above all, his willingness to passionately defend his art."

Again, it needs to be said that Atlas proceeds as if he were writing the life of Stanley Elkin, not the unfolding of a will-to-greatness, whereby conversance—to use Atlas's word—with the greatest writers and thinkers was partly noble nourishment and partly Bellow's easy cousinhood, the dream of equivalence. Why was *Dangling Man* "defiantly literary"? Because, Bellow wrote at the time to his publisher, "if I thought I were merely talented and clever in a small way I would give up writing tomorrow and never write again, not so much as a letter."

MOST IMPORTANTLY, Atlas's peculiar fear of ideas slights one of Bellow's great subjects, and the source of much of his comedy. One would never know, from Atlas's account, that *Herzog* concerns an intellectual's attempt to use his wide reading, to employ his "wide knowledge of Western culture," to orient himself in modern American society. And one would never know that the novel's sad comedy flows from his failure to do so. Herzog is an adult child, flooded with memories of his close, stifling family life. He recalls his immigrant father, with his stern, furious face. Herzog hangs his head before great ideas, as a child might before his father. His intellectual patrimony is both parent and tyrant, and Herzog's wild letters to the great dead—"Dear Doktor Professor Heidegger, I should like to know what you mean by the expression 'the fall into the quotidian.' When did it happen?"—are like a son's wartime letters to his family, written at the battlefront. Nietzsche and Kierkegaard are, in effect, parents, and we moderns are like spoiled children, bloated in a wealth we do not know how to spend wisely. Tommy Wilhelm, in *Seize The Day* complains that "the fathers were no fathers and the sons no sons."

Herzog wants "to live in an inspired condition, to know truth, to be free, to love another, to consummate existence, to abide with death in clarity of consciousness," as he writes to one of his imaginary correspondents. Those darting, bold, naked desiderata: they are the subjects to which Bellow has returned again and again. Joseph, the narrator of Bellow's "defiantly literary" first novel, wonders aloud: "But I must know what I myself am." Twenty years later Herzog is still wondering this: "We must be what we are. That is necessity. And what are we?" And twenty years after that, Zetland, in "Zetland: By A Character Witness," asks: "What were we here for, of all strange beings and creatures the strangest?"

One of Bellow's replies is that, in modern America, public life tends to drive out



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private life, and that the cultivation of individuality—the securing of the soul—becomes harder and harder. Herzog quotes Emerson: "The private life of one man shall be a more illustrious monarchy ... than any kingdom in history." But the self is not only crowded by American modernity—a theme, incidentally, that DeLillo would develop into postmodern America; it is also threatened by an age which, after the moral collapses of the two World Wars, has ceased to believe in the moral stability, or even in the reality, of the self. The "I" has become only a figure of speech, and that speech clots in our mouths. People who have never read Sartre are "touting the Void as if it were so much salable real estate," thinks Herzog:

> This little demon was impregnated with modern ideas, and one in particular excited his terrible little heart: you must sacrifice your poor, squawking, niggardly individuality—which may be nothing anyway (from an analytic viewpoint) but a persistent infantile megalomania, or (from a Marxian point of view) a stinking little bourgeois property—to historical necessity. And to truth. And truth is true only as it brings down more disgrace and dreariness upon human beings, so that if it shows anything except evil it is illusion, and not truth. But of course he, Herzog, predictably bucking such trends, had characteristically, obstinately, defiantly [ah, Atlas!], blindly but without sufficient courage or intelligence tried to be a *marvelous* Herzog, a Herzog who, perhaps clumsily, tried to live out marvelous qualities vaguely comprehended.

Now, one might dislike this kind of writing, and object in a principled way to its existence in fiction, and find it neurotically sentimental (in Schiller's sense of the word, meaning modernly introspective), and take issue with Bellow's implied optimism (that the self is not in disgrace), and with his religiousness and mysticism ("we have ground to hope that a Life is something more than such a cloud of particles, mere facticity. Go through what is comprehensible and you conclude that only the incomprehensible gives any light"). What one cannot do is deny that this is thought at all, or assume that it does not exist in the novels. Is this an example of "belaboring" an idea, or of Bellow's being "not a complex thinker"? Were Joyce or Woolf or even Mann complex "thinkers" in the philosophical sense that Keynes or Wittgenstein were? Of course not.

Atlas quotes Bellow in a characteristic joke about his new-born baby Gregory, who was regular in his eating habits. "So was Kant, asserted Bellow, always mindful of the Great Books." Is this an assertion or a joke? Is Bellow being anxiously "mindful" of the Great Books, or is he drolly yoking two worlds, his sacred and his profane? It is easy to forget that many of Bellow's heroes are failures or clowns in thought; the comedy of the novels has much to do with the prospect of the inefficacy of ideas, the piles of intellectual slack which truss these schlemiels like babies. "Oh so much human thread being wound on the most trivial spools," the narrator laments in *More Die of Heartbreak*. And Herzog wonders if thought can wake him from the dream of his mad existence, in which he runs chaotically from wife to mistress. "Not if it [thought] becomes a second realm of confusion, another more complicated dream, the dream of intellect, the delusion of *total explanations*."

Out of this disjunction between the rage to explain and the rage to experience, Bellow creates a distinct modern irony—witty, heated, cerebral. He universalizes and simultaneously mocks the universalizing impulse: "Cops have their own way of ringing a doorbell. They ring like brutes. Of course, we are entering an entirely new stage in the history of consciousness," thinks Charlie Citrine, in his characteristic jumble, in *Humboldt's Gift*. And this comedy is not only an intellectual or academic comedy; we are not merely laughing at the delusions of intellectuals, we are also experiencing the pathos of their aspirations.

Sometimes these comic creatures are


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not intellectuals at all, as Tommy Wilhelm is not, in *Seize The Day*. Perhaps nothing is more movingly comic in the whole of Bellow than the scene in *The Adventures of Augie March*, in which Einhorn, a Chicago autodidact, writes an obituary of his father for the local newspaper. Stiff, clumsy, noble, the obituary is foolishly, ambitiously "intellectual," and the reader is able to see, in a paragraph, the quavering pretensions of a generation of intelligent American Jews:

> Einhorn kept me with him that evening; he didn't want to be alone. While I sat by he wrote his father's obituary in the form of an editorial for the neighborhood paper. "The return of the hearse from the newly covered grave leaves a man to pass through the last changes of nature who found Chicago a swamp and left it a great city. He came after the Great Fire, said to be caused by Mrs. O'Leary's cow, in flight from the conscription of the Hapsburg tyrant, and in his life as a builder proved that great places do not have to be founded on the bones of slaves, like the pyramids of Pharaohs or the capital of Peter the Great on the banks of the Neva, where thousands were trampled in the Russian marches. The lesson of an American life like my father's, in contrast to that of the murderer of the Strelitzes and of his own son, is that achievements are compatible with decency. My father was not familiar with the observation of Plato that philosophy is the study of death, but he died nevertheless like a philosopher, saying to the ancient man who watched by his bedside in the last moments. . ." This was the vein of it, and he composed it energetically in half an hour, printing on sheets of paper at his desk, the tip of his tongue forward, scrunched up in his bathrobe and wearing his stocking cap.

I doubt that this could be bettered by Dickens or Joyce, and when we read it we are splashed by the antique streams of the greatest comedy. We begin the obituary in laughter and end it in tears, in a sublime dapple of emotions. Everything is here: the ungrammatical pompousness of the unpracticed writer ("leaves a man to pass through the last changes of nature who found Chicago a swamp". . . "saying to the ancient man who watched by his bedside"), the rambling, feebly chanelled anarchy ("he came after the Great Fire, said to be caused by Mrs. O'Leary's cow"), the intellectual hauteur that crumbles into non-sequitur ("my father was not familiar with the observation of Plato that philosophy is the study of death, but he died nevertheless like a philosopher"), the historical allusions hanging off the sentences like sloths ("in flight from the conscription of the Hapsburg tyrant"), and finally Einhorn's affecting, foolhardy American optimism, whereby this new land proves that "great places do not have to be founded on the bones of slaves." Such care, such favoring finesse! Note that Bellow does not have Einhorn write "Plato's observation that," which is the formulation that a real intellectual would use, but the more upholstered and uneasy "the observation of Plato," a phrase whose awkwardness enshrines a certain distance from Plato. And what a delicious word "observation" is here—as if Plato were someone who tossed off *mots* like Wilde.

So this novelist, whose novels are actually full of references to Plato, is also able to write movingly about a man who might well be, to use Atlas's words, only "conversant, in a literary way," with Plato and Aristotle—but Atlas sounds as if he is writing Einhorn's biography! And Atlas sounds a little like Einhorn himself, telling us that Pierre Bayle's great theological and historical dictionary was a "satirical dictionary"; that Henry James's self-description ("try to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost") was a comment about James by T. S. Eliot; that Eliot called himself a Roman Catholic, when he called himself an Anglo-Catholic; and so on.

## II.

SAUL BELLOW WAS nearly born in Russia. His father, Abraham Belo, came to Lachine, Quebec, in 1913, and Bellow was born in June, 1915. He lived in Quebec for eight years, before his father moved the family to Chicago in 1924. Abraham Bellow went to work at Dworkin's Imperial Baking Company. Repeatedly, in novels and stories, Bellow has his protagonist dream back to the days of Bellow's childhood on Saint Dominique Street in Lachine, or to the later years just east of Humboldt Park, in Chicago. Though his first novel is more contained than any of his later work, the true Bellovian note bursts through at one moment, when Joseph is polishing his shoes, and recalls doing the same as a child in Montreal:

> I have never found another street that resembled St. Dominique . . . . Little since then has worked upon me with such force as, say, the sight of a driver trying to raise his fallen horse, of a funeral passing through the snow, or of a cripple who taunted his brother. And the pungency and staleness of its stores and cellars, the dogs, the boys, the French and immigrant women, the beggars with sores and deformities whose like I was not to meet again until I was old enough to read of Villon's Paris. . . a cage with a rat in it thrown on a bonfire, and two quarreling drunkards, one of whom walked away bleeding, drops falling from his head like the first slow drops of a heavy rain in summer, a crooked line of drops left on the pavement as he walked.

The reference to Villon, the blood dripping heavily "like the first slow drops of a heavy rain in summer": it is all here, in little form, in Bellow's first novel, written in his late twenties. In *Herzog*, Saint Dominique Street becomes Napoleon Street, and Herzog recalls "my ancient times. Remoter than Egypt":

> Up and down the street, the brick-recessed windows were dark, filled with darkness, and schoolgirls by twos in their black skirts marched toward the convent. And wagons, sledges, drays, the horses shuddering, the air drowned in leaden green, the dung-stained ice, trails of ashes. Moses and his brothers put on the caps and prayed together,
>
> *"Ma tovu ohaleha Yaakov. . ."*
>
> "How goodly are thy tents, O Israel."
>
> Napoleon Street, rotten, toylike, crazy and filthy, riddled, flogged with harsh weather—the bootlegger's boys reciting ancient prayers. To this Moses's heart was attached with great power. Here was a wider range of human feeling than he had ever again been able to find. The children of the race, by a never-failing miracle, opened their eyes on one strange world after another, age after age, and uttered the same prayer in each, eagerly loving what they found. What was wrong with Napoleon Street? thought Herzog. All he ever wanted was there. His mother did the wash, and mourned. . . . His sister Helen had long white gloves which she washed in thick suds. She wore them to her lessons at the conservatory, carrying a leather music roll . . . On a summer night she sat playing and the clear notes went through the window into the street. The square-shouldered piano had a velveteen runner, mossy green as though the lid of the piano were a slab of stone. From the runner hung a ball fringe, like hickory nuts. Moses stood behind Helen, staring at the swirling pages of Haydn and Mozart, wanting to whine like a dog. Oh, the music! thought Herzog.

In later years, family and friends were astounded by Bellow's comprehensive recall of the tiny details that they had forgotten—the interiors of shops, the names of businesses, the way a tradesman limped. His niece, writes Atlas, wept when she read *Herzog* and encountered the description of her grandfather's house: "the crescent moon in the doorbell, the chimes that play 'Merrily We Roll Along,' his step-



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mother's shuffling footsteps in her slippers—I'm reading this and the tears are rolling down my face. He was writing my life. That's when I knew he was a genius."

Yet an embrace from Atlas turns out to be akin to hitting apparently soft water at high speed—it is actually deadly. For he follows this lovely tribute with this: "The genius and the self-regard are of a piece." But so what? Let Bellow be self-regarding if he wants to be. Atlas's irritation at what he takes to be Bellow's narcissism and arrogance pollutes the best part of this very diligent biography, which is its fine, detailed evocation of Bellow's childhood and adolescence in Quebec and Chicago. Bellow's mother died when he was seventeen, and Atlas argues, plausibly enough, that Bellow never recovered from this loss, and that his compulsive womanizing was less sexual than emotional in impulse. Atlas skillfully describes the early years, in which Bellow struggled with his uncomprehending father ("*Was meinst du* 'a writer'?"), and with his lack of publication. Bellow was both very confident and very insecure.

But soon Atlas's narrative curdles. Late in his life Bellow returned to Lachine, and in a speech there he argued that one cannot be described as only the product of one's roots. It is not true to say "Show me where you came from and I'll tell you what you are." "That's not the way things really are; we are people capable of freedom, and some of us are even willing to take chances for the sake of freedom." A biographer should write the history of this passage to freedom, should see that a superior soul with superior gifts has to be accounted for. It is an elitist assumption, no doubt; but without such an assumption the biography of a great writer leaks away its rationale. Bellow's "sins"—how he treated his wives, and how self-regarding he was—were committed in the process of creating an imperishable body of work. It is not so much that they should be "forgiven," whatever this means, than that they must be judged in the light of the work of which we are the beneficiaries. An awkward but undeniable utilitarianism must be in play: the number of people hurt by Bellow is probably no more than can be counted on two hands, yet he has delighted and consoled and altered the lives of thousands of readers.

Atlas refers again and again to Bellow's "narcissistic traits," to his "failure to empathize with others." Bellow preferred Minnesota to New York, he writes, because he was "more comfortable as the odd man out . . . than among more dominating types who threatened his sense of specialness." Again, so what? If Bellow is special, then, as Herzog has it "we must be what we are. That is necessity." After *Herzog*, Atlas loses affection for the novels. He criticizes *Humboldt's Gift* as an inadequate and ungenerous portrait of the poet Delmore Schwartz. It was "an act of revenge against the poet . . . the dominant note is one of self-satisfaction." Schwartz is merely used "as a convenient vehicle for Bellow's high-flown meditations on art and success in America." (High-flown: there's them ideas again!)

This astounding novel marks, for Atlas, a decline in the work: "gone also was the rigor of his early books, replaced by the jaunty tone of the garrulous, well-read, and self-important elder statesmen of Chicago who would come to dominate his books . . . the plot is as untidy as the prose." Accordingly, the later novels are marked down. *Mr. Sammler's Planet* is curmudgeonly, racist, self-pleased: "*Mr. Sammler's Planet* is a novel of ideas, to describe it in its kindest light." And *The Dean's December* is racist, "shrill"; "there is something grotesque abut the way Bellow appropriated" a celebrated Chicago murder case "for his own literary purposes."

"For his own literary purposes": Atlas describes Bellow's project, his Flaubertian "slow patience," as if it were some kind of irrelevant hobby, like keeping racing pigeons, for no greater glory. Perhaps it sounds naïve to remind Atlas that Bellow appropriates these stories for us, for his readers, for his predecessors, for his art.


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Yet Atlas proceeds as if Bellow has no right to his freedom as a literary artist, as if that freedom had no great value.

What do I mean by freedom? If reading Bellow is a special way of being alive, that is in part because we sense in his books a writer truly living, a man singing through all his ventricles, using a prose of scudding speed, a cloud always chasing the sun of experience. That Bellow's mode of being in his books is a special way of being in the world, and that this is contiguous with Bellow's way of being in the world outside his books, in daily life, can be ascertained by comparing the wit of his *obiter dicta* and other remarks with what appears in his prose. If one laughs when Atlas quotes Bellow saying that the *Partisan Review* crowd "want to cook their meals over Pater's hard gemlike flame and light their cigarettes at it," it is in exactly the same way that one laughs for joy when Herzog looks up at the ceiling and reflects that "the spiders had the moldings under intensive cultivation, like the banks of the Rhine. Instead of grapes, encapsulated bugs hung in clusters."

Thus Bellow's "freedom" in life is his freedom in art. The same spirit animates the life and the work. Such a man should be allowed to soar, and it is of little historical importance that this same man was touchy, arrogant, a poor husband. Atlas seems to want to close down Bellow's freedom, and this is no more apparent than in the wrongheaded way that he discusses Bellow's fiction. He insists that Bellow "appropriates" the stories of his friends and throws them, unswaddled, into his novels. Atlas is continually reminding us that such-and-such a character is really so-and-so in real life, and that so-and-so was very hurt by Bellow's theft.

BUT SURELY BELLOW'S style is strong enough to dissolve away these biographical powders. A writer would never take someone from life in this thieving way, for the good reason that there are only a limited number of things to say about an actual person, while there are an infinite number of things to say about an imagined person. Characters are always composites: a little of this actual person, a little of that one, and then a strong imagined element. Atlas in effect concedes this without noticing it, and contradicts himself. He writes that "as usual Bellow made no effort to disguise the models of his characters—and they weren't pleased . . . Jonas Schwartz . . . was furious to find himself represented as the hectoring, dwarfish Sandor Himmelstein." In *Herzog* Himmelstein has had part of his chest blown away in the Second World War, and is hunchbacked. He is crude and brutal. But if Bellow made no effort to disguise his characters, how could Jonas Schwartz complain about being the brutal, dwarfish Himmelstein? Either Schwartz is himself in the novel, or he has become Himmelstein, in which case he has become a composite. If he has become Himmelstein, he is no longer Schwartz.

One suspects that such people, despite their complaints, secretly *want* to see themselves portrayed, as certain people look at shop windows only to see their own wavering reflections. In so doing they miss the very handsome window displays that have nothing to do with them. Bellow's old schoolfriend Dave Peltz, a Chicago contractor, was angry to find that a story which had involved him, about which he was embarrassed, and which he had asked Bellow not to reproduce in fiction, appeared in *Humboldt's Gift*. He wrote to Bellow, and Bellow replied admirably, with generosity and sensitivity:

> It wasn't *you* who was the subject. People have written about me. Their me is not me. It couldn't matter less. What matters is that good things be writtten. Dear God how we need them! . . . I promised not to write Your Life. But this was all I *could* promise. We've known each other forty five years and told each other thousands and thousands of anecdotes. And now, on two bars suggested by one of your anecdotes, I blew a riff . . . What harm is there in that? Your facts are unharmed by my version . . . These aren't questions of property, are they?. . .
>
> Now David, the nice old man who wants his collection of memory-toys to play with in old age is not you! You harm yourself with such fantasies. For the name of the game is not Social Security. What an error! Social Security is an entirely different game. The name of the game is Give All. You are welcome to my facts. You know them, I give them to you. If you have the strength to pick them up, take them with my blessing. Touch them with your imagination and I will kiss your hands . . . What you fear as the *risk* of friendship, namely, that I may take from the wonderful hoard is really the *risk* of friendship because I have the power to lift a tuft of wool from a bush and make something of it . . . So I know how to transform common matter. And when I give that transformation has that no value for you? . . . As for me I long for others to do it. I thirst for it. So should you.

His letter seems to me a model. A firm insistence, a *droit d'auteur*, runs throughout it, to be sure; and yet there is little harder for a successful writer than to deal with the wounded sensitivities of a less successful childhood friend. For Atlas, however, the letter stinks of self-regard. It is "a remarkable testament to the artist's sense of self-sovereignty—the needs of art trump all other needs. It also offers a glimpse of the soaring valuation he placed upon his own work . . . and his total lack of empathy for Peltz, whom he dismissed with withering condescension as a 'nice old man' playing with his 'memory-toys' while Bellow, the great novelist, went about the serious business of making art. The ever-tolerant Peltz, in an affectionate letter of forgiveness, agreed to let be."

"While Bellow, the great novelist, went about the serious business of making art"—the phrase pulses with resentment. But Bellow *is* a great novelist, and making art *is* a serious business, and it demanded and received from Bellow, in this instance, a serious letter. Why would he not place a "soaring valuation upon his work"? Clearly Atlas is not going to do it. Does the reader care that Dave Peltz was a little wounded, or should the reader's—and the biographer's—interest not be in the production of that distinguished novel? Bellow, incidentally, does not dismiss Peltz as an old man playing with his memory-toys; he says precisely that Peltz is not that man, that such is unworthy of him.

Perhaps Atlas truly feels that Dave Peltz's sore nerve-endings are more important than Bellow's fiction. In any event, it seems not to occur to Atlas that perhaps Peltz forgave Bellow because he agreed with his old friend, and because he knows that his old friend is a great writer. It is not about Social Security, it is about Giving All. One recalls Bellow's speech in Lachine, and his talking of taking a "risk" for freedom; once again, to his friend, he writes of the "risk" of friendship to a writer, and argues that the risk must be taken.

IT BECOMES CLEAR that Atlas is not writing the biography of a freedom-loving mind, of an imagination, but of a seducer, a bad husband, and money-earner who also happened to write some good books (though not since 1965). His biography, the fine early Chicago pages excepted, is metalled with materialities: how much Bellow earned, how many lovers he had (and the attendant crudities of revelation: "As a lover Bellow received indifferent marks. . ."), which friends he betrayed, which ex-wives got into which books. Atlas's Bellow is a *picaro* of positivism, perpetually on the road from one brute fact to the next. (One recalls Herzog's hope that a Life be not "mere facticity.")

One quickly tires of Atlas's relentless interest in Bellow's Don Juanism. We hear rather too little about Bellow's relations with the contemporaries whom he most



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admired, such as Ralph Ellison, John Berryman, John Cheever, and, younger than them, Philip Roth. When Berryman jumps off a bridge in 1972 and briefly reenters Atlas's narrative, the reader starts, suddenly realizing that almost nothing has been said for hundreds of pages about the poet who laughed and muttered with delight as he read the manuscript of *The Adventures of Augie March*, and who wrote well about precisely that area which Atlas neglects or disdains, Bellow's intellectual and literary allusiveness. The novel, wrote Berryman, is "dominated by a recurrent allusiveness to masters of Greek, Jewish, European, and American history, literature, and philosophy . . . We might called them Overlords, or Sponsors . . . The Overlords have a double use. They stand as figures of awe and emulation to Augie . . . and they create historical depth, the kind of legendary perspective that our naturalism has deeply desired . . . Replacing the vague merciless forces invoked by Dreiser, they remind me of the marvelous vast heads of statues in some of Watteau's pictures, overlooking his lovers."

### III.

WHAT WOULD A proper biography of Bellow, a biography of Bellow's imagination, have looked like? Consider this rapid sketch, late in Atlas's book: "But he was strangely isolated. In London, he lived the life of an international literary celebrity, dining with V.S. Naipaul and Isaiah Berlin. In Paris, he drank with Samuel Beckett at the Pont-Royal. But in Chicago, he often dined alone, on 'a piece of fish' from Burhop's." It is the only reference to Bellow's meeting Beckett in the book. Now turn to James Knowlson's intellectually scrupulous biography of Beckett, where we learn that Beckett read *Humboldt's Gift* in 1978, was very "excited" by the novel, and asked, through intermediaries, to meet Bellow. The meeting was apparently awkward; both men were shy. In Knowlson's account, the meeting arises out of Beckett's reading: this is what has been occupying Beckett's mind. In Atlas's account, the meeting is part of the big swoosh of being an "international literary celebrity."

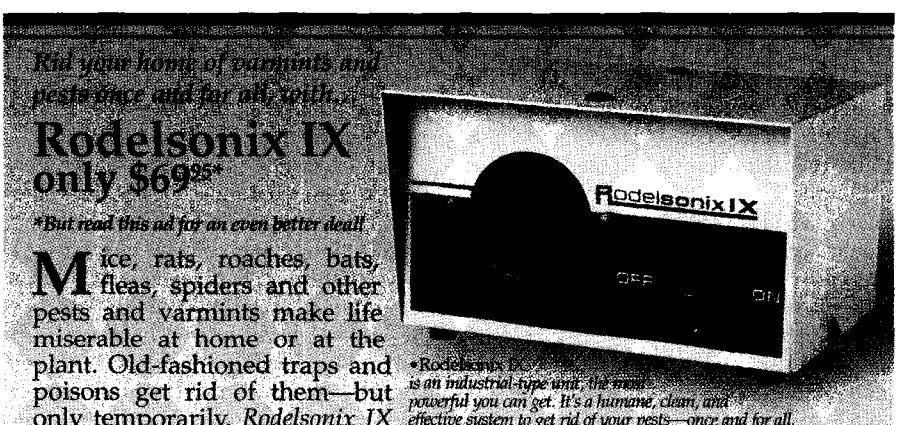
It might have been interesting to discover what Bellow thought about Beckett's writing. It might have been revealing to compare their achievements, since Bellow and Beckett are the major postwar English-language writers. It is, after all, one of the significances of Bellow's career that, in the age of Beckett, the age of late modernism, he has retained the soul-pungency of the nineteenth-century novelists, and the metaphysical leanings of the great Russians. He is like an earlier generation of writers in his determination to deliver his characters from the inessential. He once wrote that when we read "the best nineteenth and twentieth century novelists, we soon realise that they are trying in a variety of ways to establish a definition of human nature." In most contemporary literature, however, "this power to understand the greatest human qualities appears to be dispersed, transformed, or altogether buried." In his Nobel lecture, he declared that "there is another reality, the genuine one, which we lose sight of. This other reality is always sending us hints, which, without art, we can't receive. Proust calls these hints our 'true impressions.'"

At the risk of sounding apocalyptic, we might say that Bellow has extended the life of the novel. He has certainly reprieved realism, held its neck back from the blade of the postmodern; and he has done this by revivifying realism with modernist techniques. His prose is densely "realistic," and yet it is hard to find in it any of the usual conventions of realism. People do not walk out of houses and onto streets, and his characters do not have "dramatic" conversations. It is almost impossible to find sentences in Bellow along the lines of "He put down his drink and left the room." That is because most Bellovian detail appears as memory in his novels, as scenes that are filtered through a remembering mind.

Detail is modern in Bellow because it is always the *impression* of a detail; and yet his details still have an unmodern solidity—they are indeed "true impressions."

> My ancient times. Remoter than Egypt. No dawn, the foggy winters. In darkness, the bulb was lit. The stove was cold. Papa shook the grates, and raised an ashen dust. The grates grumbled and squealed. The puny shovel clinked underneath. The Corporals gave Papa a bad cough. The chimneys in their helmets sucked in the wind. Then the milkman came in his sleigh. The snow was spoiled and rotten with manure and litter, dead rats, frogs. The milkman in his sheepskin gave the bell a twist . . . And then Ravitch, hung over, came from his room, in his heavy sweater.

Herzog is recalling this scene—and hence that aspect, so strong in Bellow, of a kind of emotional cubism, whereby the mind returns repeatedly, but with variations, to the same details, and ponders and reponders. It is a relaxed stream-of-consciousness, disguised by its relaxation so that it almost seems as if it were conventional realism. Of course, Bellow learned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from Joyce that the stream-of-consciousness gives realism new life, because it absolves realism of having to persuade in the conventional way. A standard realist account would try to convince us that the scene in Herzog's kitchen was happening as we witness it, or as another character witnessed it. In such a convention, for us to "believe" in the milkman would necessitate the conjuring into life of that milkman—a plausible description of his existence. But memory can select and assert, can pounce on one small detail—the bulb with its large loose twist of tungsten—precisely because these events have happened long ago, and there is no pressure to convince us. In Bellow, realism is relieved of the pressure of simultaneity in which it often awkwardly finds itself. ("She entered the room and gave a sharp cough.") Bellow is using detail not to persuade us of the existence of something, but almost the opposite: to confirm its absence.

Realism is elegiac, a branch of consciousness, in Joyce and Bellow. Curiously enough, the stream of consciousness, for all its reputation as the great accelerator of description, actually slows down realism, asks it to dawdle over tiny remembrances, to circle and return. The stream of consciousness is really an ally of the short story, of the anecdote, the fragment—and it is no surprise that the short story and the stream of consciousness appear in strength in literature at about the same time, towards the end of the nineteenth century, in Hamsun and Chekhov. In a short story writer such as Babel (who was translated into English in 1929, and whom Bellow would certainly have read in the 1930s), one encounters small, sharp details, broken off and removed from the large, sustaining arboretum of conventional realistic narration. Sometimes, the sound is very close to Bellow: "Even Shoyl, my grand-uncle, went along. I loved that boastful old man, for he sold fish at the market. His fat hands were moist, covered with fish-scales, and smelt of worlds chill and beautiful ... Besides the salesmen, old Lieberman, who had taught me the Torah and ancient Hebrew honoured us with his presence. In our circle he was known as Monsieur Lieberman. He drank more Bessarabian wine than he should have. The ends of the traditional silk tassels poked out from beneath his waistcoat, and in ancient Hebrew he proposed my health."

So Bellow has been an impressionist—more, a plush pointillist—and a realist at once, and he has been both well into a postmodern age, extending and securing for another generation the life of the novel, and nothing less. His work reminds us of the infinite varieties of realism—and that all writing flows from it, for realism schools its own truants, teaches its rebels (surrealism, magical realism) how to be. "He was beautiful deep eloquent fragrant original," writes Bellow of Humboldt, in the novel that James Atlas considers high-flown and an act of revenge on Delmore Schwartz. "Ah Humboldt had been great—handsome, high-spirited, buoyant, ingenious, electrical, noble. To be with him made you feel the sweetness of life." It is true of Bellow, too. ■

# The Rhetor

*By* DAVID NORBROOK

## Elizabeth I: Collected Works edited by Leah S. Marcus, Janel M. Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose

**(University of Chicago Press, 446 pp., $40)**

AT LAST YEAR'S Oscar ceremonies, two different Queen Elizabeths were in line for an award. The Virgin Queen certainly has iconic status today, just as she did four centuries ago. Her life has been reworked in endless biographies, historical novels, and movies. But in the torrent of words about her, the queen's own words have been hard to find. This new edition of her *Collected Works* is, remarkably, the first book in those 400 years to bring together her writings across a range of genres: poems, letters, speeches, and devotional writings.

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DAVID NORBROOK is professor of English at the University of Maryland and the author of *Writing the English Republic: Poetry, Rhetoric and Politics, 1627–1660* (Cambridge University Press).

In the traditional representations of Elizabeth, less attention has been paid to her intellectual interests than to her failure to marry, and to whatever psychological hurts might explain why she did not do so. After all, her early life had been traumatic by any standard. Henry VIII had married her mother, Anne Boleyn, after a controversial divorce from his first wife, Katherine of Aragon, that provoked a momentous breach with the Roman Church. Desperate for a male heir to perpetuate his line, Henry was deeply disappointed when his first child proved to be female. Within three years he had turned to a third wife, Jane Seymour, whom he married only ten days after Anne Boleyn was beheaded. Elizabeth was declared a bastard.

By the time Elizabeth was ten years old, Henry had worn through two further wives and had married his sixth, Katherine Parr. She befriended Elizabeth, had her declared legitimate, and took a leading role in her education. After Henry's death in 1547, Parr remarried with a speed that was considered unbecoming. Her new husband, Thomas Seymour, had earlier considered Elizabeth as a bride, and was before long accused of flirting with her himself. Soon after Katherine's death in childbirth, Seymour was accused of treason, and humiliating details about his alleged sexual familiarity with Elizabeth were aired in the legal proceedings. Elizabeth had to testify in a way that would clear her and her stepmother; she responded firmly and pressed the government to issue a proclamation denying rumors that she was with child by Seymour.

There is plenty of material here for a pathological reading of Elizabeth's later life. Resisting repeated urgings from her councillors, she refused to marry. She had



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a succession of male favorites, but she maintained a distance from all of them, developing the image of the unsullied Virgin Queen. Elizabeth has become such a rich provocation for the romantic plot-writer although, or because, she herself continually resisted romantic scenarios. Her humanist learning has often been seen as a mere façade behind which her feminine heart was perpetually palpitating. But today Elizabeth's choice of ruling the country over becoming a wife and a mother is less likely to seem merely an aberrant pathology. Instead it opens up new areas of interest in her writings. This new edition concentrates on Elizabeth's political and intellectual interests, though it does present the materials from which the different psycho-histories have been constructed.

THOUGH THIS FOCUS on the woman as political activist will be congenial to our times, Elizabeth's role as a humanist intellectual and a pioneering woman writer may still be rather hard to assimilate. Historians of women's writing in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have tended to construct a narrative of heroic emergence from a previous state of utter darkness. Readers are primed to expect earlier women to be silenced, marginalized, denied access to education. It is rather disconcerting, then, to confront a woman who could compose a collection of prayers in Latin, Greek, Spanish, French and Italian—an achievement that few of us are in a position to patronize.

As a queen, of course, Elizabeth was an exception. Renaissance humanists succeeded in persuading the ruling elites that an education in the arts of language was essential for public service. But women could not normally expect a role in public life, and in any case there were deep-rooted prejudices against female learning. Still, some humanists pressed for at least modest education for women, while fathers eager to arrange prestigious marriages came to feel that their daughters should at least be able to meet educated suitors on the same ground. Henry VIII's unusually high turnover of queens was a vivid reminder that you never quite knew when your daughter might be raised to high rank.

Henry's queens were indeed pioneers in female learning. Katherine of Aragon had been educated in Spain by a woman professor of rhetoric. Anne Boleyn had humanist interests and Katherine Parr encouraged them in Elizabeth. She offered a political as well as literary role model, for Henry made her regent while he was abroad in 1544. It was during this period of female authority that Elizabeth wrote to Katherine her first surviving letter (in Italian); later the same year Elizabeth dedicated to Parr her first literary work, a translation from the French of Marguerite Navarre's *Mirror of the Sinful Soul.* Marguerite belonged to the international circle of women intellectuals into which Elizabeth was being initiated. Elizabeth's next translation was of a work by Katherine Parr herself, the *Prayers and Meditations* to which she had turned after her regency; and at the same time she translated for Katherine the first chapter of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* thus following her stepmother into the realm of a faith-based Protestantism with which her father was still uneasy.

After Henry's death in 1547, Katherine was emboldened into publishing a more personal treatise of her own, while Elizabeth's *Mirror* was published—with what degree of collaboration by Elizabeth remains unclear—by a radical printer on the Continent. The reformer John Bale, who was working on a huge bibliography of writings by British male authors, added a note in which he situated Elizabeth in a long tradition of women writers—and rulers—and called for a history of their works. The publication of the *Mirror* took place at the same time as the alleged flirtations between Elizabeth and Seymour. It makes a less sensational story, but a remarkable one nonetheless.

BEFORE SHE WAS sixteen, Elizabeth had established herself in a tradition of female authors. Before she could consolidate this position, however, she faced years of unrest. Under the reign of her brother, Edward VI, she had to fight off scandal but at least shared in the strongly Protestant ethos of the reign. When, in 1553, Mary succeeded, determined to bring the nation back to the Catholic fold, Elizabeth immediately found herself under suspicion. Her surviving letters to the new queen are desperate attempts to exonerate herself from charges of heresy and sedition.

Once she took the throne herself, in 1558, Elizabeth was able to emulate and to go beyond Katherine Parr in finding a role for herself as a female ruler and writer. In 1563 and 1569, two volumes of prayers were published. These have been neglected in the study of Elizabeth's writings, but they form a very important part of her canon. In these prayers we see how the Protestant emphasis on God's direct intervention in history could cut across traditional strictures against female rule. "My enthroned office," Elizabeth writes, is "a heavy weight, surely, for a woman's shoulder, but light with Thee making it light." She thanks God for giving her "prudence even beyond other women ... distinguished and superior in the knowledge and use of literature and languages, which is highly esteemed because unusual in my sex." Though she is "by my nature weak, timid, and delicate, as are all women," God has "caused me to be vigorous, brave, and strong," so that "I, like another Deborah, like another Judith, like another Esther, may free Thy people of Israel from the hands of Thy enemies."

Elizabeth casts herself as an exception; and her God could create such exceptions at will. But this language of exceptionality, of divine immediacy, could cut both ways. It could offer encouragement both to a woman in power and to any monarch who wanted to defend royal authority as divine. On the other hand, what would happen if God withdrew that immediate support? One prayer declares that God maintained her as sovereign only "on condition that she revere Thee absolutely, defend the virtuous, and seek vengeance on the wicked and lawless." The notion that Elizabeth would be worthy of losing her throne if she failed to defend the faith zealously enough was a potentially sensitive one.

Patrick Collinson has noted a later prayer, circulated under her name, which came closer to hinting that her rule was conditional, and he has questioned how far the prayers correspond to Elizabeth's personal religious convictions. From the start of her reign, after all, Elizabeth made a number of very public gestures of conciliation toward Catholic practices, retaining a cross in her chapel and showing other signs of sympathy for religious traditions. She became an object of suspicion to some Puritans, who regarded her as backsliding from the piety of her youth.

By the end of her reign she was a bulwark of religious conservatism, and her later theological position is unlikely to have appealed to Calvinists. Perhaps she was making compromises with conservative subjects; perhaps her prayers were an exercise in a familiar vein of piety from which she personally became detached but which helped reconcile the stronger Protestants to her rule; perhaps not all the prayers were hers. Historians will continue to debate these uncertainties. At least we now have the evidence of the prayers firmly before us.

MORE FAMILIAR AS examples of Elizabeth's literary skills are her public speeches. Oratory was a role traditionally reserved for males, but she had carefully studied the classical oratorical texts. Elizabeth's speeches to Parliament have been much quoted, but this edition is the first to make possible a close scrutiny of the evidence for what she actually said. Many of her most celebrated



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speeches survive in different versions, and biographers normally conflate them to suit whatever narrative they wish to construct. This edition offers multiple versions of the speeches, and it also gives the full texts of the petitions to which they responded, thus making it much easier to understand her rhetorical strategies.

It is not the case, as the editors make clear, that we can necessarily find a single authentic version. Elizabeth may have spoken first and then written down a version afterward; in other cases drafts survive which have been much revised and we cannot be sure which version was actually delivered; and other texts were transcribed by auditors with varying degrees of reliability. In her first speech to Parliament, she had to counter strong urgings that she should immediately marry. According to a frequently quoted version, she stretched out her hand, showed her ring, and declared that she had already taken an oath of marriage to the kingdom. But this version belongs to a later tradition, and a more contemporary version makes no such unequivocal lifetime commitment to virginity. It appears that the icon of the unchanging Virgin Queen was constructed with hindsight.

What do these speeches show about Elizabeth as an orator? To some extent she emerges as an anti-orator, though with the consistent aim of holding on to her right to authority in speech. Again and again Parliament presented her with long and eloquent petitions warning of the dangers to the realm if she did not marry. There was no clear mechanism for securing the succession in the absence of a direct heir; and the subtext to the petitions was the belief that women should subordinate themselves to husbands. In her replies, Elizabeth again and again tries to hold herself above the particular arguments rather than engaging with them in detail, giving what she calls in one speech "an answer without an answer."

Here is her response to the House of Commons in 1563: "The weight and greatness of this matter might cause in me, being a woman wanting both wit and memory, some fear to speak and bashfulness besides, a thing appropriate to my sex." So far, so modest. "But yet," and here she strikes her distinctive note:

> the princely seat and kingly throne
> wherein God (though unworthy) hath
> constituted me, maketh these two
> causes to seem little in mine eyes,
> though grievous perhaps to your ears,
> and boldeneth me to say somewhat in
> this matter, which I mean only to touch
> but not presently [at once] to answer.

From the bashful woman fearful to look up, she has become the monarch in her throne, looking down from above as God does from the heavens.

This divine boldness enables Elizabeth to assert her authority to give an answer and to refuse to give an answer. And from here she moves on to what will become a favorite classical anecdote, of the philosopher who ran through the alphabet before answering a hard question. Elizabeth's frustrated councillors must have felt that she never made it to Z: a rhetoric of stalling became her preferred mode. Where humanist rhetoric favored the sharp cut and thrust of dissecting and returning arguments, Elizabeth preferred to claim her right not to argue at all.

As she reaches her conclusion, Elizabeth warns her speakers not to forget "that by me you were delivered whilst you were hanging on the bough ready to fall into the mud—yea, to be drowned in the dung." The editors gloss this remark to refer to "Catholicism and papal jurisdiction under Mary Tudor." After making clear her distaste for the petition, she turns to rebuking "some restless heads in whose brains the needless hammers beat with vain judgment that I should mislike their petition": in fact she likes the "matter and sum," differing only over the "circumstances." They could ask as much as they liked, provided they did not presume on an answer. And then she concludes with the assurance that "though after my death you may have many stepdames, yet you shall never have any a more mother than I mean to be unto you all."

This sudden return to female pathos would have come as a surprise so soon after she had been laying satirically into the feeble intellects of the male parliamentarians. In context, the effect is as much infantilizing as reassuring. Indeed, this speech makes it easy to understand how often courtiers and statesmen began encounters with the queen with the aim of setting her to rights and departed wondering what had hit them. Wrong-footing her audience, she reminded them, after her preamble of female modesty, that but for her they would have been plunged in the shit.

Elizabeth's letters could be just as forceful. Particularly remarkable is the correspondence with James VI of Scotland. Elizabeth had long resolved to make James her heir, but true to her normal methods she kept him guessing. James had received the same kind of advanced humanist education, and Elizabeth takes pleasure in upstaging him on his own ground, impaling him on an ill-chosen quotation from Virgil and forcing him into a strained reinterpretation of the *Aeneid*. Having been a dutiful pupil in her youth, she is now both the humanist educator and the prince training her successor. With her own favorites, she could be even more outspoken. The Earl of Essex liked to express his political grievances in the form of extravagant love-complaints; and Elizabeth strikes at the heart of his language when he seems to be delaying his military advance in Ireland: "your pen flatters you with phrases ... still exclaiming against the effects of your own causes." As in her responses to Parliamentary petitions, she takes the initiative by changing the ground of argument.

Though this edition takes a broad view of what counts as a "work," one aspect of Elizabeth is not represented. This is the Elizabeth who found the time during a political crisis in 1593 to translate Boethius's *The Consolation of Philosophy* with the fervor of an athlete aiming at a world record—a secretary recorded that the whole project had taken a little over twenty-four hours. This enthusiasm for translating classical texts ran right through her life, from her early training in "double translation"—from the original tongue to English and back again.

For an early modern writer, "works" would normally include translations: imitating and reworking classical texts was regarded as a very significant contribution to literature. To that extent, this edition, which excludes translations, is a little less than a *Collected Works*—the more so since, rather remarkably, it does not even provide a listing of all of Elizabeth's extant writings. (Presumably this will be provided in the forthcoming second volume, which will include the original versions of her foreign-language texts and the English texts in their original spelling.) For a fuller understanding of the poems included in the volume under review, it is really necessary to backtrack a little, and to have a look at Elizabeth's wider literary interests.

Humanist pedagogy counseled writers to grow dramatically into other voices, where a more recent pedagogy would have writers strip away anything that does not seem immediately relevant to their personal, gender, or ethnic identities. At its worst, humanism could lead to ritualized parroting of undigested authorities—though Shakespeare, Marlowe, and Jonson went through this system without showing strong signs that their imaginations had been crippled. It is not surprising that the first wave of feminist literary history, concerned with personal identity, with liberating women's authentic voices from patriarchal convention, tended to underplay the role of female humanists. The ironic result, however, has been to risk repeating the unease felt by earlier generations with the "bluestocking." Elizabeth the intellectual, then as now, is more



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difficult to assimilate into myth than Elizabeth the lover or Elizabeth the pragmatic politician.

YET WE CAN learn a lot about Elizabeth through her translations. Where the prayers engage with the world of Reformation piety, some of her translations explore more secular concerns which took her further from a conventionally female sphere of interests. She ran through the humanist canon: Isocrates, Sallust, Seneca, Cicero. The resurgence of translating in her sixties included not only Boethius but two other works that, as Kevin Sharpe has suggested, may throw light on her political preoccupations.

In 1598, she translated Horace's *Ars Poetica*, at a time of growing public discussion of the political role of satire. Around the same time she translated Plutarch's essay *On Curiosity*, which rebukes prying and prurience, from subjects over-curious about mysteries of state to men looking through windows to catch intimate glimpses of women. As a woman and as a stateswoman Elizabeth was especially aware of the burdens of being looked at: she wrote to James that "we princes are set on highest stage, where looks of all beholders verdicts our works; neither can we easily dance in nets so thick as may dim their sight." The Plutarch translation gives us a glimpse of her own response to this situation.

Elizabeth was in view especially as an Anglicized version of Petrarch's Laura, his visionary muse and mistress: Laura became Spenser's Gloriana and Sir Walter Ralegh's Belphebe. Critics have devoted much attention to the way Elizabeth was constructed by her subjects as the Virgin Queen, but they have been less clear about her own agency in the process. A possible clue here is a translation, probably made very early in her reign, of Petrarch's *Triumph of Eternity*, the last of the six *Triumphs*, in which the poet sees Laura enthroned as an elect soul in heaven. Not only does Elizabeth pioneer a poetic mode that was to become much more common later in the reign, but in adopting Petrarch's voice she becomes a Laura celebrating Laura.

Elizabeth manages to render ninety lines of Petrarch's flowing Italian in eighty-eight of her own, at the cost of some syntactic stiffness and awkwardness. The bad news about Elizabeth's writing is that it can be very difficult reading. This is partly because she was a child of what C. S. Lewis termed the "drab age," when spare, clipped discourse, with ornamentation largely confined to abrasively heavy alliteration, was yet to be displaced by the ornate "golden" writing of Spenser and Ralegh. Even when translating Petrarch, she holds back from the harmonious balance of the Italian poet.

BUT THERE IS an exception in the most conventionally "Petrarchan" poem in this edition's canon:

> I grieve and dare not show my
> discontent;
> I love, and yet am forced to seem to hate...
> Some gentler passion slide into my mind,
> For I am soft, and made of melting snow;
> Or be more cruel, Love, and so be kind.

There is some doubt about the attribution of this translation, the more so given that the editors have now redated the main manuscript authority from 1601 to the late seventeenth century. The manuscript title, "On Monsieur's Departure," relates the poem to the diplomatic negotiations surrounding a projected French match, and thus fits it into a romantic view of Elizabeth as nursing a passionately beating heart behind the public persona. Whether or not composed by Elizabeth, this poem does not reflect her normally angular, clipped poetic style. There is no feminine coyness in the climax of an almost certainly authentic poem that she addressed to the seditious followers of Mary Stuart:

> My rusty sword through rest
> Shall first his edge employ
> To pull their tops who seek such change
> Or gape for future joy.

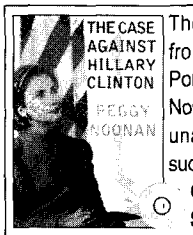
Elizabeth's resistance to florid rhetoric is personal and political as well as generational. All these aspects come out in her exchanges with younger courtiers during the 1590s—when, as we have seen, she was meditating on the relations between poetry and politics. Beside the sharp exchange of letters with Essex we can set a verse exchange with Sir Walter Ralegh, who was fond of addressing her in particularly exalted terms; Elizabeth ridicules him for being "slain quite by her that ne'er gave wise men blow." This was rather disingenuous, given that Elizabeth had herself contributed to the age's Petrarchanism and hardly discouraged flattery; but here once again stylistic economy could be a way of seizing the initiative.

Obscurity, moreover, secured for Elizabeth a realm into which her subjects could not easily follow her. She begins one oration by observing that since the Bible is subject to so many contradictory interpretations, "shall I hope that my speech can pass forth through so many ears without mistaking?" But mistaking might work to her advantage. In a couplet probably composed during her imprisonment by Mary, she wrote:

> Much suspected about me,
> Nothing proved can be.

There is a defiant taunt behind this lament: though she doubtless considers herself innocent, she will say no more than that nothing can be proved. Elizabeth wanted to make her authoritative words known *and* avoid committing herself unnecessarily, and her writings often manage to have things both ways. Language provided a net in which she could dance. The obscurity of her late style is partly the absolutism of someone who does not invite—or benefit from—criticism.

THE POLITICAL GENEALOGY of the queen's style is complex. The humanists who educated her placed in the center of their canon texts that relentlessly attacked tyranny and warned of the dangers of courtly flattery; and Elizabeth internalized some of that suspicion of ornate rhetoric. From a relatively early stage, however, she was showing an equally strong wariness about Parliamentary eloquence. Patrick Collinson has argued that some of the political nation were already viewing England as a "monarchical republic," in which the monarch was ultimately constrained by the popular will. So Elizabeth's encounters with Parliament were not just a matter of a feisty woman taking on a male world, they also involved different conceptions of the monarch's role. One of her last public appearances as a humanist orator, in 1597, was in a fierce Latin rebuke to the Polish ambassador: she chided him for impro-

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priety, and said he could only be excused because his master, as a merely elective king, did not properly understand how to address monarchs. Though her courtiers applauded her eloquence, this concern with justifying legitimate titles distances Elizabeth from the central values of earlier Tudor humanism.

Whatever the political determinants, by her later years the drive to compression in Elizabeth's style had become ingrained. Here is her working of a chorus from Boethius:

> Dim clouds
> Sky close
> Light none
> Can afford . . .
> Running stream
> That pours
> From highest hills
> Oft is stayed
> By slaked
> Stone of rock.

Ezra Pound, who hated "Petrarchan cream-puffs," might have found something to value here. Elizabeth's late "Englishings" cannot be recommended as easy ways into the originals, the more so as speed did not make for accuracy; but they have a certain fascination in their choice of concrete, idiomatic phrases and their disdain for conventional word order.

And the late translations prepare us for the most remarkable recent discovery among Elizabeth's writings. This is a long poem, written in French, that survives in her own hand among papers from the 1590s. With stylistic oddities not unlike her version of Boethius, this poem has been taken to be a translation from some lost original; but the editors of this volume take it to be an original composition. Whatever the truth, this poem is a fascinating glimpse of the ageing Elizabeth's spiritual world.

It narrates a spiritual journey in which the soul, compared to a child taking its first steps and to a humble shepherd, is offered successive illuminations, and despite setbacks ultimately achieves a state of harmonious balance. Though there are Biblical echoes, we do not find here the militant, evangelical Protestantism of the prayers. The emphasis is on a stoic self-mastery, and there is no sense of Calvinist predestination:

> I saw that when [God] formed me
> He gave me no state at all,
> But placed in my hand
> What I myself took,
> What contented me most—
> Which could be bestial,
> Or otherwise human,
> Or which was angelical—
> And that it was in my hands
> To take the divine.

This strange, convoluted poem is hard to describe as a literary success, yet even in a translation of an original in rather makeshift French, and even with its gaps and its obscurities, it has a haunting quality. After so many years of struggle, this is the queen's *Paradiso*. The Laura who became so impatient with her subjects' praise of her as a goddess is now writing herself into eternity. ■

# And Lofty Flows the Don

*By* Peter Berkowitz

## The Cunning of Unreason: Making Sense of Politics by John Dunn

(Basic Books, 349 pp., $30)

I.

"But what is philosophy good for?" Wonder aloud about the sources of right and wrong, speculate offhandedly about the meaning of life, or (most ominously in the young) sign up for a college philosophy class, and you can count on confronting such a question, typically put by friends and family in a tone at once mocking, chiding, and a little worried. And yet the question is a fair one, even a philosophical one. It is a fair question, because philosophy lacks an obvious payoff or a plain practical value. Philosophy is rarely beautiful like literature, or gripping like history, or solid and useful like economics and the natural sciences. And it is a philosophical question, because philosophy's very purpose is to articulate a reasoned account of the world, a curious and noteworthy part of which is the practice of philosophy itself.

"But what is philosophy good for?" It is also an ancient question. It was answered classically in *The Clouds* by Aristophanes, who depicted Socrates suspended in a basket aloft, blathering on about heavenly spheres and invisible substances and nasty insect anatomy, confounding others without putting forward views of his own, indifferent toward the competing claims of justice and injustice, oblivious of the requirements of politics and day-to-day existence, and unconcerned about the impact of his opinions and conduct on the opinions and conduct of others, particularly that of his own students. No less classical was Plato's reply on his teacher's behalf. Far from corrupting the young by occupying them with worthless or impious matters, philosophy, in Plato's account, is the best and the most practical of activities. Better than its great rival poetry, philosophy sheds light on the crucial question—what is a good life for a human being?—to which a truly practical man or woman would devote most time and thought.

John Dunn is no Platonist. But his new book is animated by the Platonic conviction that philosophy is necessary to make sense of politics, even as the arguments that it develops—always eloquently elaborated and suffused with learning—provide support for the Aristophanic suspicion that philosophical study is a prescription for making nonsense of politics.

Dunn is best-known as the author of an influential book on the political thought of John Locke. He is also a founding father, with his colleague Quentin Skinner, of the so-called Cambridge school, which champions an approach to the study of political theory that lays special stress on the significance of historical context to the formation and the interpretation of arguments and ideas. The Cambridge school teaches that the proper understanding of arguments and ideas requires that they be read with a full and supple knowledge of how words were used by the thinker and

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his contemporaries; with a grasp of the background notions that always in one way or another shape values, direct judgments, and color conclusions; and with an appreciation of the social and political circumstances to which thinkers were responding and which they sought to influence. All this is sensible enough. And yet the details can distract and the accumulation of historical knowledge can get out of hand—as, for example, in Dunn's work on Locke.

A major thesis of *The Political Thought of John Locke*, which appeared in 1969, and a short work, *Locke*, which appeared fifteen years later, is that from beginning to end the eighteenth-century English philosopher's thought is informed by a "deeply Puritan pattern of sentiment." But the portentous conclusion that Dunn draws—that little of Locke's political thought is relevant today because of the "the intimate dependence of an extremely high proportion of Locke's arguments for their very intelligibility, let alone plausibility, on a series of theological commitments"—is unwarranted. Moreover, it betrays three errors typical of the Cambridge school's method.

For a start, Dunn's approach does not merely proceed from the sober assumption, bolstered by common sense and experience, that an author is molded by his times. Rather, in the guise of respecting the flow and force of history, Dunn propounds an absolutist and decidedly unempirical view, that thinkers are prisoners of the historical epoch in which they write, and are forever unable to break the mold, and to see beyond the contemporary horizon, and to transcend their time. Dunn's approach also defines context too narrowly—overlooking, for instance, the fact that an author's world is in part formed by his readings of, and meditations upon, thinkers from others times and places. And the method covertly substitutes historical erudition for textual analysis, inferring an author's meaning more from the tendencies of his time than from the logic of his argument.

The errors induced by the preoccupation with history blind Dunn to the contemporary significance of a large number of Lockean arguments, particularly arguments about the fundamentals of morals and politics. In fact, Locke's teachings on individual rights, consent, the separation of powers, executive prerogative, the right of rebellion, toleration, and education for liberty have roots that extend well beyond his "theological commitments" and his "deeply Puritan pattern of sentiment." Since they are based in views that are still widely shared—about the natural freedom and equality of all human beings, the relation between reason and the passions, and the capacity and limits of the human mind—and since they are elaborated with subtlety and rigor, Locke's moral and political teachings remain not only intelligible and plausible but, contrary to Dunn, pertinent and illuminating.

In a quest for relevance, Dunn has increasingly turned, over the course of the last two decades, from the history of political thought to contemporary politics. Seeking to reach out beyond the confines of his discipline to address a broader audience, he has published a number of books aimed at thoughtful and engaged citizens who are dissatisfied with the politics of the day and desire a deeper understanding of the decisive issues. *The Cunning of Unreason*—whose provocative title becomes by book's end merely baffling—is Dunn's most ambitious such effort. It begins with grand, speculative questions: What is politics? Why is there any politics at all? Will politics ever come to an end? It moves on to an examination of how politics has come to take its characteristically modern form, by which Dunn means the nation state that combines representative democracy and capitalism. And it concludes with reflections on whether we have available, or can hope to develop, a form of political judgment that is of any practical use.

Notwithstanding the abstract and nonpartisan character of the questions around which Dunn's book is loosely organized, the real driving force of his argument is his anguished effort to come to grips with the demise of socialism as a viable political alternative. Though many passages in his book are despairing, Dunn struggles to be cautiously pessimistic. Our situation is bad, he believes; but if we follow his lead and learn to think about politics as he proposes that we think about it, then we might still avert the worst.

DUNN'S SPECULATIONS ON the first principles of politics are prompted by the opinion, which he announces at the outset, that what needs explaining is how far politics in our age has fallen. But instead of inspiring confidence in the speculations that will follow, his overwrought and ill-considered preliminary observations provoke doubts about the practical judgment that orient his inquiry. "Politics," he writes,

> has come to be a vaguely degrading and highly specialized occupation: the trade of Tony Blair and Peter Mandelson, of William Hague and Michael Howard, and until quite recently at least one of the trades of Jonathan Aitken: also, of course, the trade of Bill Clinton and Newt Gingrich, of Benjamin Netanyahu and Yasser Arafat, of General Suharto all too recently and, alas, still of Saddam Hussein as I now write. And vaguely degrading? Well, on the evidence of this list alone, plainly a career wide open to all but unmentionable talents and an occupation blatantly unfit for gentlemen—let alone gentle women. And this last was a complaint pressed from the beginning not merely against the cultural styles of conspicuously brutal and autocratic regimes but also very much against the impact of democratization on the personnel who lead or govern a political society.

Indeed, Plato warned 2,500 years ago that democracy, notwithstanding its manifest attractions, is an imperfect regime in which governing depended on the art of pandering to the people's passions. So why does Dunn—a historian of political thought no less!—carry on about how politics has only recently become "vaguely degrading"? And what of Dunn's invidious comparisons and odd contrasts? For all of his considerable flaws and various blunders and misdeeds, does Bill Clinton really belong on a continuum of disrepute with Saddam Hussein?

And what possesses Dunn to imply that the robust presence in contemporary global politics of schemers, scoundrels, and thugs reflects some sort of new development? It would be tedious to list even a few highlights from the virtually unbroken history of political wickedness. Curiously lacking in perspective, Dunn's disdainful remarks proceed as if there hasn't always been plenty of moneygrubbing, backstabbing, and power-seeking; as if savage cruelty and bland indifference had not proved to be deeply rooted and tenacious tendencies; as if as long as there have been gentlemen (however defined) they have not doubted whether politics was an undertaking fit for them; as if lovers of justice have not regularly and for good reason chosen to pursue it without the benefit of political office.

DUNN'S SWEEPING JUDGMENTS suggest that his speculative inquiries are not altogether free and disinterested. Still, to get to the bottom of our need for politics and why we cannot hope to overcome it, he considers four theories. The first, which he calls original sin or moral error, declares that we have politics because "there is a way in which human beings should behave but in which most of them conspicuously fail to." The second claims that "politics occurs among human beings because of, and only because of, historically created conflicts of interest between them." The third asserts that politics arises from "the force and idiosyncracy in human judgment." And



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the fourth of Dunn's candidates for the foundation of politics is the logic of collective action, which suggests that "politics comes from, and is endlessly reproduced by, the logical relations between actual and possible human actions."

One could take issue with Dunn's elaboration of these theories—for example, his treatment of original sin as if it exhausted the religious point of view and as such was unworthy of consideration by serious people. Or one could object that the theories that he adduces as independent attempts to identify the source of politics were never intended for that task, but are really his own contrivances summoned to play an explanatory role for which they are imperfectly suited. Or one could point out, as Dunn once in a while does, that each of his theories, when properly articulated, seems to capture part of the truth about why our lives are inescapably political.

But the real objection to Dunn's long-winded theoretical excursion is that the why of politics is not so terribly puzzling. We have politics because human beings, like the proverbial old couple, cannot live with each other and cannot live without each other. Which is to say, more abstractly and ponderously, and as has been pointed out by numerous thinkers on any number of occasions, the satisfaction of human desires, material and moral and intellectual, requires the cooperation of other human beings, but life with other human beings frustrates the satisfaction of desires by producing conflict over scarce goods. Much more could be said. For the purpose of making sense of politics, however, the practical question concerns what comes next: how our collective lives ought to be arranged, to secure the goods that are necessary and to achieve the goods that make us happy and enable us to flourish.

The state, Dunn observes broadly, is the solution devised by the modern world to the problem of balancing cooperation and conflict. For him, the two big puzzles about the state are why rule in it "should be so deep, pervasive and insistent," and why we feel that "it has become so hazardous or futile for us to resist rule at all comprehensively." Here, too, one could quarrel with Dunn, in this case with his characterization of our situation as one in which politics has overstepped its boundaries and ruthlessly subjected us to invisible but pervasive forces of domination. Has there ever been a time in which individuals are as free as they are now, at least in the liberal democracies, to go where they like, to choose their work, to buy and sell as they please, to select a mate, to rear their children as they deem right, to believe and to worship or not to believe and not to worship?

To call attention to our many freedoms is not to deny the weight of conformist pressures, or that we live in an "increasingly intercommunicative and interactive world ... in which politics affects more human lives more deeply that it has ever done before." It is to insist, rather, that one must nevertheless distinguish the ways in which the modern state expands the range of choice from the ways in which it constrains the range of choice. Even in its role as the great regulator—of food and drugs, of airwaves and airspace, of production and pollution, of welfare and social security and health care—government also enhances the exercise of individual rights.

True, as a result of technology—from radio and telephone to railroads and automobiles and airplanes, to computers and the Internet—government now performs vastly more functions than it could in Locke's England or Plato's Athens. But many of the functions that government has assumed in the last two centuries take burdens off our shoulders: while others are ensuring that our meat is fresh, our water pure, our garbage collected, our mail delivered, our streets safe, and our borders protected, we can cultivate our careers, spend time with our children, or go hiking or golfing or wine-tasting or volunteering in soup kitchens. In liberal democracies, the problem could seem to be not too much rule, as Dunn would have it, but too little reflection on how best to make use of a degree and a kind of freedom that, on a large scale, is unprecedented.

To make wise use of our freedom, to distinguish the ways in which we are made more free and less free by the modern state, requires what Dunn calls "political understanding." Political understanding has two parts: the understanding of our own values and their implications, and the understanding of the forces that have brought about existing political arrangements. Dunn says many tried-and-true things about the importance in judgment of delicacy and nuance, and about the appreciation of one's limits. But then he says this:

> The avowed goals of the present rulers of Tehran are not those of their counterparts in Baghdad, Jerusalem, or Cairo. Those of the contenders for authority in Washington DC differ from those of their counterparts in Havana, Mexico City, Westminster, Paris, Madrid, Athens, Belgrade, Tokyo, Seoul, Jakarta, or Beijing. But, seen with a little historical distance, the differences are on balance less striking than the similarities.

What? From what conceivable historical vantage point could the differences between the United States and Cuba, or the United States and Iraq, or the United States and China, seem less striking than the similarities? This is not a matter of patriotic feeling, it is a matter of clear thinking. Indeed, it is from the heights of theory, and not from the depths of history, that the differences between democracy and dictatorship fade into insignificance. (Heidegger gave an example of this in 1935, when he declared that "from a metaphysical point of view, Russia and America are the same.")

Nor is it historical distance, but a distinctively partisan perspective, that allows Dunn casually to characterize Margaret Thatcher as a tyrant: "[E]ven in her own eyes, [she] effectively identified the British state with herself (following broadly the precedent set by Louis XIV, if on somewhat different assumptions)." Dunn spills rather a lot of ink to reach the fairly commonplace conclusion, at least among professors disdainful of the people, that the best way to understand the electoral triumphs of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan is that voter preferences "increasingly center on the perceived requirements for agreeable and dependable consumption." That Thatcher and Reagan rallied their fellow citizens at a crucial moment in history, that they gave voice to neglected but worthy aspiration, and that they effected reforms that contained some portion of justice, are all theoretical possibilities that Dunn turns his back on almost before he has perfunctorily noted them.

So what intellectual reward does Dunn's meandering quest for political understanding—at times hasty and vague, at times detailed and pedantic, frequently belaboring the obvious and just as frequently taking the controversial as axiomatic—finally yield? There are some fine moments: Dunn's sympathetic restatement of Hobbes's doctrine of consent, his insistence on the centrality of judgment, his heartfelt plea to resist the lures of reductionism:

> I take the fact that human beings do value not as a blunt biological fact about the members of a particular species but as a key prerogative of that species, an aspect of its very special relation to the realities which surround it, and an index of its capacity in principle to respond deeply and accurately to these realities. It is important, in this view, that human beings are not merely open to depravity and folly but also capable at their best of resisting both: capable of acting well. Any vision of politics which omits these characteristics or portrays them simply as consequences of other and supposedly stabler and more fundamental properties of the members of the species will, in my judgment, deform our understanding of politics rather than enhance it.



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But, for the most part, what is true in Dunn can be had elsewhere with a fraction of the fuss, a great deal less handwringing and posturing, and many fewer melodramatic intellectual gyrations.

Ultimately, making sense of politics for Dunn comes down to figuring out why capitalism won, and coming to grips with its dispiriting victory.

> A great deal of the understanding of modern politics consists in seeing why exactly it is that human beings today feel so effectively discouraged from even attempting bold and optimistic reorganization of the ways in which they produce goods and services: why they feel increasingly hemmed in in the main structures of their working lives and in the systems of ownership and control on which these structures depend. (Hemmed in enough to elect politicians eager to compel them to draw these bonds still tighter, and increasingly uninterested in bothering even to garland them with flowers: cf. Rousseau.)

Thus speaks the weary voice of the academic socialist who, after decades of study, obstinately refuses to confront contemporary politics on its own terms and instead subjects it, in the guise of reason's quest, to his own unexamined ideal. Thus recoils the alienated intellectual who, in the name of the people, scorns the hubbub and the hardball, the dark smoke-filled backrooms and the brightly lit public stages, the grease and the grime that are inseparable from a free people's practice of democracy. Thus laments the unphilosophic sensibility that tries to find someone to blame for the world's resolute resistance to being run in accordance with its own particular construction of the rules of reason.

WHAT CAUSES DUNN to go so badly astray? It is not the aspiration to philosophize about politics. It is the aspiration to politicize philosophy. And to do so in the Aristophanic manner, with one's head in the clouds. The problem with launching political inquiries in the realm of abstract theory—where one can scarcely distinguish between a weak, unreliable, but democratically accountable president and a ruthless tyrant—is that from the outset the thin air and the distant heights blur or render altogether invisible the very phenomena that one seeks to understand.

As Plato's dialogues marvelously illustrate, philosophy is a process of ascent, not a process of descent. It is a form of inquiry that begins on the ground, with what is near at hand. Philosophy does not contrive puzzles about the meaning of existence. It finds in the patient and probing and (where necessary) playful examination of ordinary experience and common opinion perplexities about how we ought to conduct our lives, and it lights our way not by solving or dissolving these perplexities but by bringing their features into sharper focus.

By contrast, Dunn's starting point—the question, what is politics?—is artificial and easily answered. While expending enormous reserves of intellectual energy to confirm the obvious—that politics arises out of our simultaneous need for and contest with other human beings—Dunn suppresses a host of richer and more intriguing questions. A friend appears inattentive or disloyal and we ask: what is friendship? Romance sets the heart ablaze and consumes all of our careful calculations, causing us to wonder: what is love? Torn between obligations to our family and duty to our fellow citizens, we are provoked to raise the question: what is justice? It is not the way of philosophy to provide remedies or to resolve controversies, even when our fortune and fate seem to hang in the balance. So perhaps the single most unphilosophical aspect of Dunn's book is the conceit that pervades it—that he already knows exactly what justice is, and that all that remains is to understand the enormous obstacles that the modern state places in the path of its realization.

Had Dunn begun down on the ground, he might have oriented his efforts to make sense of politics around the widely held belief that is self-evident to most of his readers and distinctive to our time: the belief in the freedom and the equality of all individuals. The belief may or may not be susceptible to theoretical proof, but as a practical matter it conditions and complicates all that we do and say and think. It steadily breaks down barriers in our minds and hearts by encouraging us to see others as like ourselves and to see ourselves as no different from anybody else, no better and no worse; and it sets us on an alternative trajectory, leading us to conceive of ourselves as isolated kingdoms, sovereign individuals, each his or her own supreme authority.

Had Dunn recognized the primacy of our belief in the natural freedom and equality of all, he would have placed himself in a better position to appreciate the political science of Locke (and Montesquieu, Madison, and Tocqueville). This political science remains the best guide to the principles that undergird liberal democracy. It faces up to the fact that politics never has been for the faint of heart and the pure of spirit, because the exercise of power requires the acquisition and the maintenance of power. It enthusiastically embraces the sovereignty of the people, even as it squarely confronts democracy's disadvantages. It calmly takes note of the considerable extent to which human conduct is driven by self-interest, providing for a form of self-government that harnesses ambition through careful institutional design while creating opportunities for individuals to rise above self-interest narrowly conceived. And it teaches that it is an error to expect salvation, or perfection or happiness from politics, because those who rule are flawed like the rest of us, and because the structures and the imperatives of public life render it an unlikely stage on which to show our best side or exercise our finest qualities.

Had John Dunn taken good advantage of the many and varied practical lessons offered by the study of the history of political theory, he might have grasped that not least of the things that philosophy is good for is preparing us for the defense of politics against the recurrent incursions of bad philosophy. ■

# CORRESPONDENCE

*continued from page 5*

of correlation of consumption patterns and mortality over the last 50 years. I was, admittedly, keen to emphasize this lack of internal consistency, but I cannot see how I can be accused of bias in doing so.

JAMES LE FANU
*London, England*

SHERWIN B. NULAND REPLIES:

The goal of "internal coherence" is not difficult to achieve in the indictment of a specific and easily measurable agent such as cigarettes, but it is enormously complex when dealing with eating habits as they are reported by hundreds of thousands of research subjects anonymously responding to questionnaires. We can hope to approach it only in the case of saturated fats, and therefore we must continue to rely on probability, which in relation to heart disease, stroke, and certain cancers is overwhelming, despite James Le Fanu's objections and the studies he cites. It is impossible to believe that he does not know this. His book stirs the pot and makes us think hard about the nature of evidence and the claim of medicine to be scientific, but its biased, misleading, and selective choice of verification should convince no critical reader or experienced clinician to change his or her mind about the role of lifestyle in health. And that, after all, was its aim. ■



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# NEW YORK DIARIST

## Bad Trip

I REMEMBER THE MOMENT I BID adieu to the organized left. It was at a spring 1976 meeting of the California chapters of the New American Movement, a socialist organization I had helped found five years earlier. The question before us was whether to endorse Tom Hayden's challenge to Senator John Tunney in that year's California Democratic primary. I was for it, but some of my fellow socialists, who regarded electoral politics in general and the Democratic Party in particular as instruments of the devil, opposed it. Our side won the debate, but what drove me irrevocably from the left was the way our victory occurred: a final, eloquent, impassioned speech by one of our Los Angeles members (now a pro-Daley Chicago political consultant) quoting Lenin's *State and Revolution* on behalf of Hayden and the Democrats. I suddenly realized I inhabited a political universe that bore no relation to American reality.

BUT, WHILE I HAVE STEERED CLEAR of socialist organizations, I still consider myself part of the broader labor and Democratic Party left. So when I was invited to moderate a panel at a conference last month on globalization and independent politics, sponsored by the Nation Institute, George Soros's Open Society Institute, the Carnegie Foundation, Barnard, Columbia, and the City University of New York (CUNY), I accepted. I'm not for Ralph Nader, and I'm not for shutting down the World Bank, but I am willing to argue with people who are. The conference was to be held at CUNY's Graduate Center, and my panel, I was assured, would be composed of illustrious academics. On the train to New York, I jotted down some notes for a talk on how the Democratic Party and liberalism had been revived in the 1990s, thanks in part to Bill Clinton's New Democratic politics. I thought I could provoke an interesting discussion. I was wrong. Instead, I was headed into another parallel universe.

THE CONFERENCE WAS WELL-ATTENDED. The plenaries attracted about 500 people, and there were quite a few well-known academics and activists. There were several informative speeches about labor and campaign finance reform. But much of what I heard suggested the same deep alienation from American society that I fled in 1976. For the most part, reality was not on the agenda.

ONE OF THE FEATURED SPEAKERS AT Friday night's opening plenary was Gwendolyn Mink, a tenured professor of politics at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and the daughter of Hawaii Representative Patsy Mink. To the audience's delight, Mink declared that "the two-party system is a sanctuary for middle-class, white-skin privilege." Addressing herself to women in the audience, she charged the two-party system with "hounding you into marriage" and "forcing you into relationships with men." Was this a reference to welfare reform, or is even that giving it too much credit? Mink then urged the audience to begin organizing in "factories, fields, and homes," ignoring the fact that since the 1920s most Americans have worked in offices, stores, and other white-collar institutions.

THE PANEL I MODERATED SATURDAY morning was called "Can Social Movements Transform the Two-Party System?" It included four academics and a campaign finance reform activist. I gave my little pitch on the revival of the Democrats, but the Democrats, it turned out, were so self-evidently evil that barely anyone else even considered them worth mentioning. Instead, Stanley Aronowitz, a professor at CUNY, and Michael Goldfield, of Wayne State University, lamented the decline of the labor movement—at a time when the AFL-CIO under John Sweeney has finally begun gaining members and has built the most powerful grassroots political organization in America. Lawrence Goodwyn, a Duke University historian, bemoaned "the stultifying loneliness of American society" and condemned the "authoritarian, male-dominated, white-dominated" political system. All three spoke at length about the absence of "real organizing," but none of them mentioned the Internet, which is quickly becoming the single most important organizing medium in America.

GOLDFIELD GAVE THE MOST COHERENT presentation, but he sounded as if he had been napping for the last three decades. He pronounced the conditions of American workers dismal and said it was "national chauvinism" to compare the working conditions of Americans favorably with those of Chinese workers. He condemned the Democrats and Republicans for supporting "imperialist war." He even took a swipe at Nader, because his "positions on people of color are largely invisible." The key issue in the election, Goldfield said, should be freedom (not just a new trial!) for Mumia Abu-Jamal, the former Black Panther who, on the basis of eyewitness testimony, was convicted in 1982 of killing a Philadelphia policeman.

THEN IT WAS TIME FOR QUESTIONS, and things got even worse. A heavyset woman delivered a 20-minute tirade accusing the panelists and the moderator of being soft on America. "You are racists from the time you get up in the morning. You are sexists, too," she exclaimed. She kept referring to brown tap water. When I tried to get her to stop so other people could speak, she invited me and the conference organizers to call the police. Other speakers adopted a confessional style, softer but no less vexing. A gray-haired woman spoke at length of her political despair. "It is so lonely. I'm tired of feeling lonely," she said. When she detected a lack of concern from one of the panelists, she yelled at him, "Don't grin at me!"

I WROTE "*MARAT-SADE*" IN MY NOTEbook—a reference to Peter Weiss's 1964 play, which takes place in an insane asylum after the French Revolution—but the other panelists didn't seem fazed by the proceedings. When Aronowitz—an editor of the pretentious journal, *Social Text*, that got suckered by Alan Sokal's wonderful hoax article pretending to deconstruct quantum physics—launched into a long-winded response to one of the questions, I asked him, too, to wrap up his remarks. Aronowitz, whom I had not seen in 20 years, turned to me and snapped, "You're always trying to make me stop talking!"

ALL IN ALL, YOU COULD HAVE HELD A more intelligent and respectful discussion of American politics and society in the sitting room of your local mental hospital. There are today, I realized, two American lefts. The reformist, democratic left of the AFL-CIO, the Sierra Club, Public Citizen, NOW, the ACLU, and the NAACP is not moribund; in fact, it may even be on the rebound. But the cultural left, housed in universities like Duke, CUNY, and UC Santa Cruz, still lives, amazingly, in the bygone world of capitalist pigs, power to the people, and Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh. And this was their conference. I had planned to stay for Nader's lunchtime address, but instead I got my suitcase and headed for Penn Station. I took the first train back to my quiet home in the Washington suburbs, where people think "white-skin privilege" is a kind of hand cream, and where, faced with brown tap water, they call the plumber.

JOHN B. JUDIS



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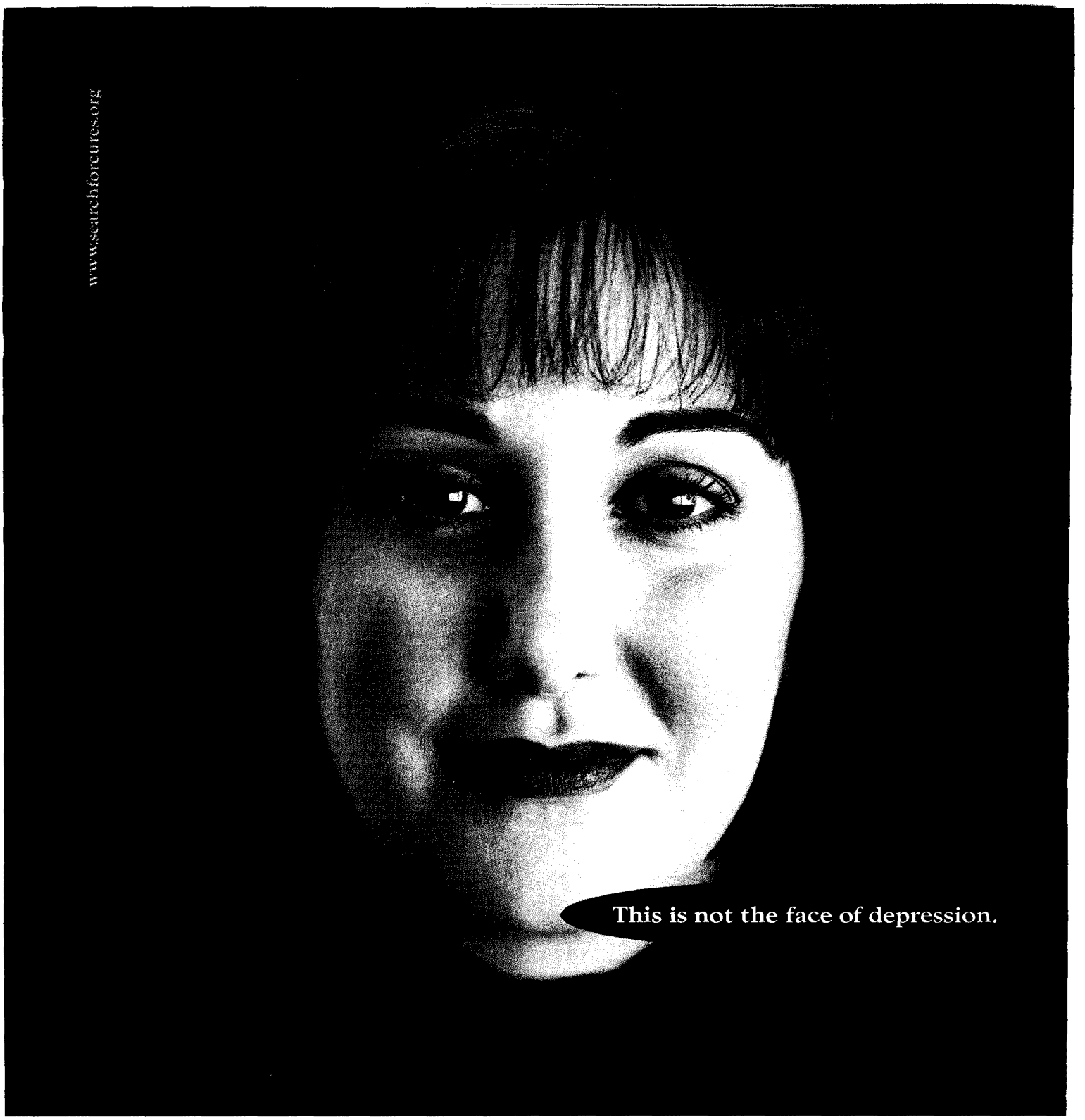


It's the face of Stacy Alynn — teacher, part-time comic and writer. For several years she had experienced an overwhelming sense of despondency and felt increasingly unable to cope with the stresses of day-to-day living. Finally, Stacy, like 17 million other Americans each year, was diagnosed with depression. Life had seemed hopeless to Stacy, with nothing but despair ahead. But now, thanks to breakthrough medicines discovered by America's pharmaceutical companies, she's able to enjoy life again and has even fulfilled her ambition to become a full-time writer. Today, new medicines for depression mean millions of people with the illness are now able to see a brighter future ahead. Pharmaceutical company researchers are working hard to discover breakthroughs that will help make many illnesses and diseases a thing of the past and bring more patients new hope for a better tomorrow. So people like Stacy can smile again. And even stand up on-stage and make other people laugh.

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